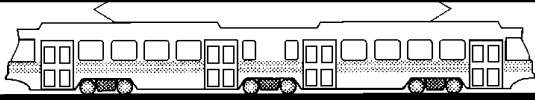


Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



Summer 2005

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The Southeast Corridor Needs to go Beyond I-485

We think stopping the Southeast Corridor short of I-485 would be a big mistake. If this transit corridor does not directly serve a campus that promises to eventually grow to 20/30,000 students, and the large scale developments that are now in the planning stages, it will limit the future ridership growth of the line.

There is another important reason for extending the southeast corridor beyond I-485. We feel at some point in the future there will be commuter rail service on the CSX between Charlotte and Monroe. Given the present alignment for the Corridor, which seems more and more certain, the only place where a direct transfer between the Southeast rapid transit line and a future commuter rail line could occur is at a future station, one stop beyond CPCC South Campus in Matthews.

Basically we think there are three good reasons for extending the Southeast Corridor beyond CPCC-Matthews:

- 1) It provides a direct transfer for passengers coming in from Union county on future commuter rail, wishing to reach points served by the Southeast Corridor rapid transit, and vice versa.
- 2) It will maximize ridership, not only on the Southeast Corridor, but on future commuter rail. **If you are putting together an entirely new transit system why wouldn't you want to build it with connectivity?** Why would you want to put impediments in place to limit seamless movement?
- 3) Why not build a large terminal and park and ride facility away from already congested areas, or areas that promise to be congested in the future. Beyond CPCC there is open, uncontested land available. It is approximately halfway between Independence US 74) and John Street (old Monroe Road), convenient to either road.

While there is presently a poor access road system within the area, we do not view that as a long-term problem. The area is certain to be developed. Most developers would probably contribute toward construction of roads that would improve transportation options close to their projects.

We are not opposed to the idea of phasing in the last (second) segment of the Southeast Corridor if necessary, crossing I-485 at a later date, if necessary to save money. Certainly we don't need to build an extension to a future commuter rail line until that line becomes a fact. However we feel strongly that the right-of-way and land for stations and parking needs to be purchased soon, and protected from development. Otherwise it may not be there when needed.

Mayor Lee Myers of Matthews suggested to cut down on the expense of tunneling under I-485 the light rail line might be combined with other public works projects, such as new roads and utility lines.

Upcoming Transit Meetings

Charlotte Area Transit System will hold public meetings to update planning for the Southeast, West, and Streetcar Transit projects.

The Southeast Corridor meetings are:

- **October 5, 2005** at the Independence Regional Library at 6000 Conference Drive from 6:30-8:30 p.m. This meeting will have special focus on the Idlewild, Village Lake, and Sardis Road North stations.
- **October 6, 2005** at the Charlotte Merchandise Mart at 2500 East Independence Blvd. from 7-9 p.m. This meeting will focus on Pecan, Briar Creek, Amity Gardens, and Sharon Amity stations.
- **October 12, 2005** at the Matthews Community Center at 100 McDowell Street East from 7-9 p.m. Focus for this meeting will be Independence Pointe, NC 51, CPCC Levine Campus, and Matthews Transit Oriented Development station sites.

While most of the alignment for the corridor has been firmed up, questions still remain about routing on the east side of the Center City and whether the line will end at I-485, or near CPCC and a possible future commuter rail station above Stallings. These questions will be answered within the next couple of months. The question of whether the line will be light rail or busway is expected by Summer 2006.

The West Corridor meeting will be **October 4, 2005** at the City West Service Center at 4150 Wilkinson Blvd. from 7-9 p.m. The meeting will focus on planned station locations between Center City and I-485. A definitive alignment is yet to be determined between Morehead Street and Uptown. These questions should be answered in coming months, and a determination on whether the line will be busway or modern streetcar is expected by Summer 2006.

The Center City Streetcar meeting will be **September 27, 2005** at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center at 600 East 4th Street, Room 267 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Topics to be discussed include route alignment, stations (median or curbside), and future extensions. Construction on initial segments could begin as early as 2009.

More Crosstown Routes Could be a Benefit

One suggestion we would like to make to help lessen the perception of crime at our Uptown Transportation Center is the addition of more crosstown transit routes. Some of this probably will take place as a natural progression in the next few years. That is because when the light rail corridors start operating crosstown bus routes will be needed to funnel passengers over to the major rapid transit corridors.

However we suggest even greater emphasis may need to be placed on creating new crosstown bus routes for two reasons:

- 1) It will greatly reduce the trip time for many individuals if they can transfer from rapid transit lines to crosstown lines, thereby eliminated long, out of the way trips to the Uptown Transportation Center, to transfer there.
- 2) With fewer riders needing to transfer Uptown the overall number of riders waiting at the terminal can be reduced somewhat. Also when the second bus transfer center opens at the Multi-Modal Transportation Center on West Trade Street, the number of people waiting to transfer buses will be further dispersed.

There have always been some drawbacks to starting new crosstown transit routes in Charlotte. Probably the greatest problem was the almost total lack of good crosstown streets in the old days. The street system here did not have the typical grid pattern common in many cities. Only in the 1970's and 1980's was there a real effort to correct the problem. The solution came in the form of connecting already existing streets to one another, where before they were only loosely connected, or not connected at all. An example is Woodlawn, Runnymede, Sharon, Wendover and Eastway.

These streets were connected and improved, to form a crosstown route. This was a good solution to a bad problem. Although there are many curves in the route across town, it slowed traffic, making it more pedestrian friendly. Even more important it avoided ramroding new streets across town, destroying neighborhoods in the process. There are still too few good crosstown streets however, and this could again become a problem, with increasing traffic and population density.

Crosstown transit lines were not quick to follow these new cross-town routes. With only a few exceptions, such as the South Park/ Sharon-Amity/UNCC route, most transit routes have continued to follow their old traditional pattern, which involves a transfer at the transit center Uptown. This has caused many riders to go miles out of their way and spend a lot of extra community time in the process. Indeed it is most likely a major factor with many people who are "discretionary" riders in deciding to drive or take the bus. By discretionary we mean people who have a car, or other means of transportation they can use.

There are of course problems with starting any new crosstown routes. One of them has always been the lack of riders.

Many crosstown routes traverse low-density residential neighborhoods, where demand for public transit has also been low. This however is slowly changing, as infill developments are gradually increasing population density.

When new crosstown transit routes are initiated a concentrated rider education program needs to be carried out! The rider needs to fully understand the time saving benefits of using crosstown routes, as opposed to transferring Uptown. This educational effort even needs to go to the extent of showing individual riders the time savings for them.

You may ask why we think our transit riders need to be educated to the advantages of crosstown connections. It is not so much for the new transit rider, who may have just come from a city where this is a common practice. It is mainly for Charlotte's long-time transit riders, who have become so use to transferring Uptown it may well have become habit-forming. However once they fully understand and appreciate the advantages of our crosstown routes we should start to see a significant improvement in their patronage.

We think there are a number of possibilities for new crosstown bus routes. On the south side of Charlotte for example a new route might start at the new South Corridor Tyvola Road light rail station. From there it would go across Tyvola and Fairview to South Park. From South Park it would continue on Fairview to Sardis to Sardis North, and a connection with the Southeast Corridor at Crown Point.

Another possible route might be a crosstown line beginning at the terminus of the new South Corridor light rail line at South Boulevard, near I-485. From there it would go to Carolina Place, then across NC 51, past the Arboretum, to Matthews and a connection with the Southeast Corridor rapid transit line. Granted some of these new services may take some time and effort to establish, but we will end up with a safer, faster, and more efficient transit system.

Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



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More Stops on West corridor - Not Less

As much as we would like to see the West corridor be all things to all people it is going to be difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish that feat. West Side citizens want redevelopment in places such as Wilkinson Blvd., while airport people, such as Jerry Orr, want to see a fast ride to the airport. The problem is trying to do both things and do them well.

With approval from the MTC CATS has now dropped the idea of light rail from consideration on the West Corridor, and instead will study BRT (bus rapid transit) and modern streetcar. Under CATS latest alignment and transit stop proposal they show only five transit stations along the entire width of Wilkinson Blvd., going out to I-485. We think so few stops could be a mistake, particularly if streetcar is the final choice. Modern streetcar is very adaptable to more frequent stops, in fact this is what it does best. Streetcar stations can be quite simple shelters, not adding greatly to the cost.

We feel that each of these transit stops along Wilkinson Blvd. has the potential to add redevelopment opportunities without adding greatly to the cost of construction or future operation of the system. Not all of these stops need to be added as part of the initial construction of the corridor, but we need to build into the line the flexibility to add these additional stops in the median or side of the street, where and when they are needed in the future. Looking at Portland, Oregon, the first city to introduce modern streetcars in the US we see their streetcar line making these frequent stops, with people simply stepping off the curb to board the cars. Plans for our own Central Avenue streetcar seem to show more frequent stops.

Seventy-five per cent of all passengers at Charlotte/Douglas airport are simply transferring from one plane to another, and will not be using any form of public transportation in Charlotte. That means only 25 per cent will have any need for it. Of these 25 percent many will be carrying enough luggage to make riding regular rapid transit difficult. We previously have suggested express bus service from our transit hubs uptown to the airport terminals as a possible solution. These buses could be specially equipped with luggage racks.

That does not mean we should forget about our airport when planning for the West Corridor. We see thousands of airport employees as possible users of the West Corridor transit service. Even flight personal, who travel lightly, could be potential riders. For them a direct connection to the airport terminals from the West Corridor is essential. At first it may be shuttle buses, but eventually a people mover. It is possible this shuttle might be designed so that it could pick up people at the remote airport parking areas and haul them to and from the terminals as well.

It is unfortunate that we need to make these hard choices between faster service and greater concentration on redevelopment opportunities within the West Corridor. However we feel if we are going to spend the money to build the line, the advantages of redeveloping Wilkinson Boulevard,

Morehead Street and the adjoining West Side neighborhoods clearly outweigh a fast ride to the airport, especially when you identify the various types of potential riders who will use the service. Most importantly it will return the greatest amount for our investment in the corridor.

Save Bland Street Trolley Barn

Chamber of Commerce brochures, local magazines and postcards all feature views of the Charlotte Trolley. Tens of thousands of conventioners and visitors to Charlotte have taken a ride on our trolley. Public Relations people know that the Charlotte Trolley is among the few truly unique things to do in Charlotte, and they have made sure everyone knows about it.

There are serious problems looming on the horizon however that could threaten the operation of our civic icons. Due to a budget cost over-run on the South Corridor light rail project the \$5.2 million dollars that CATS had earmarked for restoration of the Bland Street Car barn was cut out of CATS budget. The Charlotte Trolley was counting on using half of the space at the Bland Street barn as room to restore additional vintage trolleys and to operate a museum and gift shop.

CATS has to use the other half of the barn as the operating base for both historic trolley #85, and their three car fleet of replica trolleys.

Also this facility would allow the Charlotte Trolley to continue its history and educational programs for thousands of elementary school children, some from disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Two different developers have expressed interest in developing the site on South Boulevard surrounding the Bland Street barn. Their proposals would leave the barn itself for future joint use by CATS and the Charlotte trolley. However Crescent Properties, owner of the land immediately adjoining the trolley barn, suddenly decided to do their own development of the property. It is our understanding their position is that if money can not be found in the immediate future they plan restore the historic features to the front of the building, then convert the exterior into some alternative use such as a restaurant.

Knowing how important this building is to the continued operation of the Charlotte trolley, and the operation of the trolley cars themselves by CATS, it is hard to understand the reasoning Crescent Properties is using. By damaging the greatest asset the South End neighborhood has, they not only damage their own property value, but that of every property owner in the South End neighborhood. The Charlotte trolley's option might have been to stay at its present location at Atherton Mill, but under its present configuration there is not enough space for the Charlotte Trolley and for CATS replica trolley operations. It is also generally understood that Atherton
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Save the Bland Street Trolley Barn

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Mill does not want continued trolley operations in its building on a long term basis. CATS is likely to be forced to move the base of operations for trolley service down to their new light rail maintenance facility, now under construction on South Tryon Street.

If that should happen the home and operation of the trolleys will in all likelihood be separated from the Charlotte Trolley's museum and trolley car restoration operations. Without the physical presence of the operating trolley cars the entire nature of the museum could be damaged. Charlotte Trolley's educational and history programs would also be at risk.

We understand that Crescent Properties has waited a long time to redevelop this property. However we would hope they will exercise a little more patience and realize their civic responsibilities as a good corporate citizen of their hometown, Charlotte. Reconsidering their position regarding the Bland Street barn would be a wonderful start. Failure to do so will create a lot of problems for practically the entire community. Let's go down the list:

Problems for CATS who will have to deadhead trolleys from their light rail maintenance facility south of New Bern Street, up to Tremont Street to position them for service. The trolleys will also take up space at their facility that was designed for light rail.

Problems for Charlotte Trolley Inc. because of the impact from the loss of operating trolleys at their museum. Failure to find suitable quarters in South End could eventually result in forcing them to look at alternative locations elsewhere in the city, such as along one of the future streetcar lines CATS will be building.

Problems for every property owner in South End, because when there are problems with the operation of the trolleys it automatically creates problems for the entire South End community. Problems for the City of Charlotte and the Convention & Visitors Bureau, because anything that damages South End will have a negative effect on tourism and the convention business.

If Crescent Properties decides it needs an immediate payoff on its Bland Street and South Boulevard properties there remains another course of action for them. Sell the entire tract of land to either of two development companies who have pledged to retain the Bland Street car-barn as a trolley barn, and develop the adjoining property along South Boulevard. New TIF incentives might help with these restoration efforts.

We cannot think of a trolley barn or museum as well located as Bland Street anywhere else in the U.S. or Canada, from the standpoint of visibility and easy access. It is also among the very best from the standpoint of identifying with the neighborhood in which it is located.

Some may say the coming of light rail to South End will make the fate of the historic trolleys irrelevant. Our answer to that is we believe there is a symbiotic relationship between the historic trolleys and the South End community, which was redeveloped on the principal of preserving the old. This is a relationship that modern light rail simply can not fill.

We think it would be a hollow victory indeed if the Bland Street trolley barn's exterior was restored, only to have a plaque hung on the wall saying "This is Charlotte's historic Bland Street trolley barn, from where trolleys once operated."

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Please help us continue our fight for the best possible transit system for the Charlotte area. Become a member of Citizen's for Efficient Mass Transit. We are a totally volunteer, non-profit organization.

Your membership entitles you to one year of the quarterly CEMT Newsletter and occasional news releases. We monitor all public transit meetings. Please take a minute to help us keep you informed. Thank you!

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