

# Chapel Hill North-South BRT

## Overview of the Completed Planning Study and the Ongoing Design Project

### Completed: Chapel Hill BRT Planning Study (2013-2016)

**What was it?** A 30-month study to identify and evaluate a series of transit investment alternatives for implementation within the study corridor, which runs along the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, South Columbia Street, and US 15-501 South. This corridor, which is approximately 8.2 miles long, has its northern terminus at Eubanks Road park-and-ride lot and its southern terminus at US 15-501 at the Southern Village park-and-ride lot.

**When was it?** The planning study began in 2013 and concluded in 2016.

**Who led it?** The study was led by Chapel Hill Transit, in coordination with the Chapel Hill Transit Partners, which includes the Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill.

**What was the outcome?** The North-South Corridor Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) is a combination mixed traffic / dedicated lane BRT route that will connect the Eubanks Road park-and-ride with Southern Village park-and-ride along Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, South Columbia Street, and US 15-501.

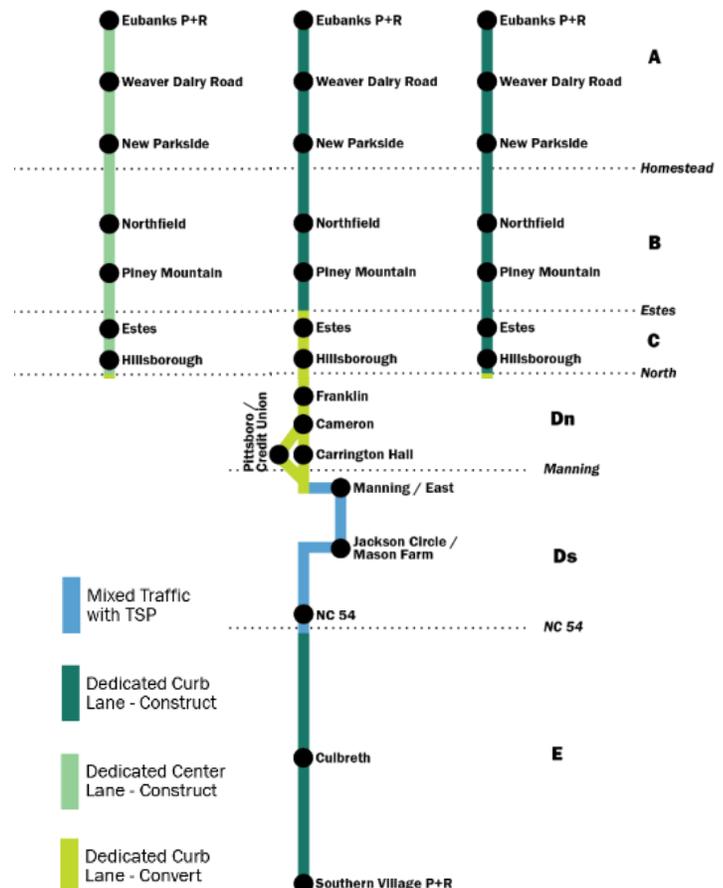
Based on feedback from the public, three versions of the same alternative have been identified as the LPA. The variations are related to dedicated lane configuration north of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and North Columbia Street intersection.

Carrying these variations into the engineering and environmental clearance process will enable the community to better understand the benefits and impacts of each, and will help to inform the detailed design and decision-making process.

#### What was the local approval timeline?

- **March 2016:** The LPA was recommended by the study Technical and Policy Committees to the Chapel Hill Transit Partners.
- **April 2016:** The Chapel Hill Transit Partners recommended the LPA to the Chapel Hill Town Council.
- **April 27, 2016:** The Chapel Hill Town Council approved the LPA before recommending its inclusion in the Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro MPO 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

The North-South BRT LPA



**How was the public involved?** Several public outreach sessions were held throughout the project, include several in early 2016 to gather public input on the potential alternatives. After technical analysis and public input, a preferred alternative was identified. This alternative was further refined and became the LPA.

**Is the project applying for federal funding?**

Yes. Following adoption of the LPA by the Chapel Hill Town Council in April 2016, Chapel Hill Transit began the formal process to seek capital funding through the FTA's Small Starts program. Following a successful application, the project may receive up to 80% of its capital funding through Small Starts. The first step in securing this funding was to get FTA approval to enter Project Development:

- **September 2016:** Chapel Hill Transit requested entry into FTA Small Starts Project Development (PD).
- **November 2016:** FTA granted North-South BRT entry into PD.

**Ongoing: 30% Design Project (2018-2019)**

**What is done during this phase?** The North-South BRT project is currently in FTA Project Development, which includes:

- Advancing the engineering and design of the LPA to 30%,
- Completing environmental review, and
- Advancing financial planning (we must show firm commitments on securing the non-Small Starts funding – which equals about 20% of the total capital cost - by summer/fall 2019).

Once these steps are complete, the project will finalize design (to 100%), and, with the approval of the FTA, may receive a Small Starts Grant Agreement and construction can begin.

**What is 30% Design?** The specifics of the LPA's alignment and station locations must be further defined and developed during this phase. Some of the engineering design work includes BRT lane design, traffic and parking analyses, integration of sidewalk and bicycle facilities, and station area analyses (location, architecture, urban design).

There are two early design tasks, which are scheduled for completion in May 2018:

1. Determine the guideway configuration at the northern end of the corridor: will the BRT use a dedicated center lane or a dedicated curbside lane?
2. Assess the feasibility of extending BRT 6.7 miles north to reach Durham Technical Community College (DTCC): should BRT be extended? If not, should underlying bus service be improved?

**The Locally Preferred Alternative**

Length: 8.2 miles

Number of Stations: 16

Frequency of Service:

Every 7.5 minutes (peak)

Every 10 – 20 minutes (off-peak)

Number of BRT Vehicles: 12

Capital Costs: \$96.8M - \$105.9M

Annual Operating Cost:

\$3.4M

Average Daily Ridership:

8,575 (+43% over existing corridor ridership)

Public engagement is also a significant part of this phase. This will be done through electronic and in-person engagement, including stakeholder meetings, design charrettes, and social media/digital platforms.

**What does environmental review mean?** The environmental review of the project, which is required by the federal government under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), will be either a Categorical Exclusion or an Environmental Assessment, depending on the guidance of the FTA. The review will assess the presence and severity of any potential environmental impacts that may be generated by the BRT. This part of the project happens when 30% Design is nearly complete because the design elements must be set before an environment analysis can start.

**What is the project schedule?** The project began in January 2018 and is scheduled to be completed in September 2019. Major project milestones include:

- **May 2018:** determine guideway type north of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and North Columbia Street intersection and determine feasibility of extending BRT to DTCC
- **August 2018:** draft 30% Design Plans are handed over to the NEPA team
- **July 2019:** 30% Design Plans are finalized, based on FTA feedback
- **July 2019:** NEPA document is published for review
- **September 2019:** FTA publishes a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), completing the NEPA review process.

**Who is leading it?** Like the planning phase, this project is being led by Chapel Hill Transit, in coordination with the Chapel Hill Transit Partners, which includes the Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill.

**How much will it cost? How many people will ride it? What are traffic impacts?** Preliminary answers to these questions will be provided in spring/summer 2018 (as design advances), with any revisions completed by fall 2019.

**How are we planning to fund construction?** The funding for the North-South Corridor BRT project will likely require a combination of federal, local, and state funding. These funding sources will likely include FTA Small Starts funds and matching funds from Orange County. However, Chapel Hill Transit will continue to explore additional funding sources throughout PD.

**How are we planning to fund operations?** This will be determined during PD, but will likely come from Chapel Hill Transit's existing O&M funding sources and/or Orange County transit funds.

**What is next?** The key milestones to advance North-South BRT into operation include:

- **Fall 2019:** Request FTA Small Starts Rating to determine eligibility for capital funding.
- **2019 – 2020:** Prepare final plans, specifications, and bid packages for BRT construction.
- **2020 – 2021:** Chapel Hill Transit will work with the FTA to develop a Grant Agreement, which is the means by which the FTA provides Small Starts capital funds. Signing the Grant Agreement marks the end of PD.
- **2021 – 2022:** Construction is anticipated to begin in early spring 2021 and last approximately 18 months.
- **2022:** Following construction, the North-South Corridor BRT would open for revenue service in 2022.