



P.O Box 1263  
Carrboro, NC 27510  
AffordableTransitforAll.com

April 27, 2017

Chairman Dorosin and Orange County Commissioners:

In the last few months, thousands of Orange County citizens have engaged in discussion of the Orange County Transit Plan. A majority have spoken out against the updated Durham-Orange Light Rail plan. The greatest concern is that the plan does not improve transportation services for most county residents, yet it introduces extraordinary financial risks.

The \$3.3 billion dollar Light Rail between Durham and UNC will serve less than 2% of the local population. The plan fails to provide promised additional bus services to our downtowns, planned growth centers, and our transit dependent communities. Light Rail service is planned to begin service in 2029 with loan repayments stretching through 2062, and will consume all available transit funds and eliminate our ability to expand public transit services for decades.

As you know, the plan adds nearly \$1 billion of debt, under the control of GoTriangle, an unaudited organization, with no credit rating or proven experience with complex infrastructure projects. In fact, GoTriangle's mishandling of schedules, funding, estimates, and communications is responsible for the latest abbreviated decision process that is so rushed that there hasn't been sufficient time for critical public review or reasonable vetting of the project.

As a result, elected officials are poised to approve the \$3.3 billion project without critical examination of many critical assumptions:

- **Projected light rail ridership.** Since the original 2012 plan was issued, GoTriangle's ridership projections doubled without adequate explanation. There is no mention of seasonal fluctuations caused by the large student and university population served.
- **Projected sales taxes.** The assumed transit tax growth is overly optimistic given the persistent and historical slow growth in Orange County, and assumes no cyclical downturns or recessions over the next 45 years. Concerns raised by Orange County's financial advisors, prominent economists and others have been ignored.
- **Interest rate risk.** There has been no discussion of interest rate risk associated with nearly \$1 billion of debt. Future interest rates will vary widely depending on market conditions, the future credit rating of GoTriangle, and the quality of the assets (including sales tax revenues) that will secure the loans.

Planned bus hours have been cut and the Chapel Hill North-South Bus Rapid Transit project is funded at such a low level that it cannot be built. There is not enough evening or weekend bus service to make public transportation a reality for those who most need it. Real connectivity within Orange County and to the greater Triangle is not achieved by this plan or by the money spent. If the county or its towns decide later to make urgently needed public transit improvements, additional taxes will be required, since the majority of the ½ cent transit tax funds are consumed by the Light Rail project for the next 45 years.

The financial evaluation of project benefits, costs and revenues conducted by our elected officials is incomplete and unacceptable. If approved, Orange County's citizens will be committed to a financial plan that falls apart if just one of many assumptions goes wrong. Failure to meet our commitments could result in larger loans, and/or adverse impacts to the county's credit rating. Providing the transit that's actually needed could require increased property taxes and reductions in other county services.

Orange County officials expressed a desire to shield the county from undue risk. Yet commissioners are about to enter into an inter-local agreement that places us at a disadvantage if anything goes wrong. Orange County's role is clearly subordinate to GoTriangle and Durham County. Consider that two stations planned for Chapel Hill have already been identified as potential cost cutting measures.

According to the proposed inter-local agreement with Durham and GoTriangle, changes are approved by "mutual agreement". That means: (1) if federal or state funding or proposed private donations do not materialize; or (2) if Orange County's sales taxes don't grow as projected; or (3) if Durham and GoTriangle want changes that Orange County doesn't like, the county is likely to end up in a losing arbitration. The inter-local agreement excludes access to appeals and to the courts. Orange County would have a weak case in disputes because the commissioners rushed to approve the sales tax, ridership, financing and service assumptions that form the basis of the contract.

This large and risky plan comes at a time when Orange County faces enormous pressure on its schools and essential services. Federal and state governments are reducing funding for health care, nutrition for children and seniors, affordable housing and public education. That's in addition to the General Assembly's continued challenge to local impact fees and taxing authority. The Commissioners have not explained how the voter approved bonds from last November will affect tax rates, or how future needs for schools, facilities and essential services will be funded.

April 27<sup>th</sup> is Orange County's last chance to say "no" to this ill-conceived plan. Any other vote leaves citizens throughout the county with grave concerns about our transit future and the fiscal risks associated with the plan.

Anticipating that we may have the opportunity, we are ready to work with county officials to develop a new transportation plan that truly serves the needs of all county residents.

Sincerely,

David Adams, Chapel Hill  
Christine and Terry Bazzarre  
Jamezetta Bedford, Chapel Hill  
Tony and Deb Blake, Bingham  
Margie Brache, Chapel Hill  
Bruce and Dolly Buley, Hillsborough  
Aaron and Sarah Butner, Hillsborough  
Alex Cabanes, Chapel Hill  
Ashley Campbell, Hillsborough  
Rev. Robert Campbell, Rogers Road  
William and Ann Charles, Chapel Hill  
Lucy Castle, Efland  
Alex and Maria Castro, Bingham  
Bentley Cecil, Efland  
Katherine Wilkerson Cheek, Hurdle Mills  
Patricia Clayton, Hillsborough  
Sheila Creth, Chapel Hill  
Sue Culbreth Denton, Hillsborough  
Irene Doherty, Chapel Hill  
Nicolas Dominkovics, Chapel Hill  
Phil Duckwall, Bingham  
Bill Efland, Efland  
Jaye Ruth Efland, Efland  
Mike Efland, Efland  
Arthur and Debbie Finn, Chapel Hill  
Vivian Foushee, Chapel Hill  
Mary George, Chapel Hill  
Sam and Christy Gharbo, Efland  
Bishop Victor Glover, Hillsborough  
Laurel Goldman, Chapel Hill  
Kevin and Jaci Greenhill, Mebane  
Kim Greer, Little River  
Joan Guilkey, Chapel Hill  
Linda Haac, Carrboro  
Suzanne Haff, Chapel Hill  
Rachel Phelps Hawkins, Cedar Grove  
Bonnie Hauser, Bingham  
Bruce Henschel, Chapel Hill  
Mariella Hernandez, Carrboro  
Nancy Holt, Bingham  
Charles Humble, Chapel Hill  
Nina Hypes, Bingham  
Leslie Jaffe, Chapel Hill  
Larry and Joyce Johnson, Rougemont  
Rudy T. Juiliano, Chapel Hill  
Lisa Kaylie, Chapel Hill  
Lucretia Kinney, Carrboro

Jane Kirsch, Chapel Hill  
Karin Kolenberg, Chapel Hill  
Chris Krueger, Chapel Hill  
Fred Lampe, Chapel Hill  
Ken Larsen, Chapel Hill  
Ann J. Loftin, Chapel Hill  
Julie McClintock, Chapel Hill  
Brenda McCall and Dick Harmsen, Bingham  
Vickie McGee, Bingham  
Elaine Marinucci, Cedar Grove  
Marie and Robert McAdoo, Efland  
Elvira Mebane, Efland  
Douglas and Yvonne Mendenhall, Chapel Hill  
Eugene and Anne Montgomery, New Hope  
John N. Morris, Chapel Hill  
Fred S. Naiden  
Nancy Oates, Chapel Hill  
Bob Patrick and Polly Dornette, Mebane  
Phil N. Post, Chapel Hill  
Jeff Prather, Chapel Hill  
John Quintero, Chapel Hill  
David and Terri Ray, Efland  
Jorge and Michelle Rios, Hillsborough  
Diane Robertson, Carrboro  
Shella Record, Little River  
Gianni & Lynn Scattolini, Chapel Hill  
David Schwartz, Chapel Hill  
Ed Sharpe, Efland  
Wade Snipes, Efland  
Del Snow, Chapel Hill  
Mary Sonis, Carrboro  
Deb Suchoff, Chapel Hill  
Tana Hartman Thorn, Bingham  
Karyn W. Traut, Chapel Hill  
Terry and Robert Vance, Chapel Hill  
Susan Walser, Bingham  
Joey Ware-Furlow, Chapel Hill  
Tamara and Whitney Watson, Bingham  
Jeff and Judy Weinstock  
Norma and Dick White, Little River  
Diane and Robert Willis, Chapel Hill  
Phyllis Wright and Harlan Fields, Hurdle Mills  
Mark Zimmerman, Chapel Hill

CC: Orange County Citizens and Media