

Transitions

SUMMER/FALL 2008



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Public Supports Proposed Project Changes

Public involvement is a vital part of the transit planning process. After all, this is your community and you should have a say in how it looks now and in the future. CATS held public workshops in July to get feedback on the work staff has conducted since the last set of public meetings in March 2008. Proposed changes included:

- Moving the 16th St. Station north at Parkwood Ave. and Brevard St for better visibility and access;
- Shifting the 36th St. Station to the south side of 36th Street to avoid impacts to historic properties (further analysis indicates station should move to west side of the railroad);
- Moving the Sugar Creek alignment alternative northeast to avoid historic buildings;
- Consolidating the City Blvd. and Harris/N. Tryon stations at McCullough Dr. to eliminate service overlap; and
- Evaluating an alternative for the UNC Charlotte alignment that would move the Mallard Creek Church Station further east of the intersection at N. Tryon St.

Here's what we heard from you:

Do you agree that changing these station locations would better serve customers at the proposed new location?

	Yes	No Preference	No
16th St. Station	48%	38%	14%
36th St. Station	72%	14%	14%
McCullough St. Station	80%	13%	7%
Mallard Creek Church Station	79%	14%	7%

Which alignment alternative best serves the community?

NCRR	No Preference	Sugar Creek
61%	9%	30%

Which alignment alternative provides the best opportunity for revitalization of N. Tryon St.?

NCRR	No Preference	Sugar Creek
57%	12%	31%



North Carolina Railroad and Sugar Creek alignment options. The evaluation is scheduled to be complete in December 2008.
 Legend: Yellow line: Sugar Creek alignment, Black line: NCRR alignment, Circles: 1/4 mile radius from proposed station

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NEWS FROM THE CHARLOTTE AREA TRANSIT SYSTEM
 FEATURING THE LYNX BLUE LINE EXTENSION



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Ridership on the RISE

Fed up with high gas prices? Tired of the parking lot called I-85? Trying to breathe easier by reducing smog? These days, there are almost as many reasons for riding CATS as there are riders.

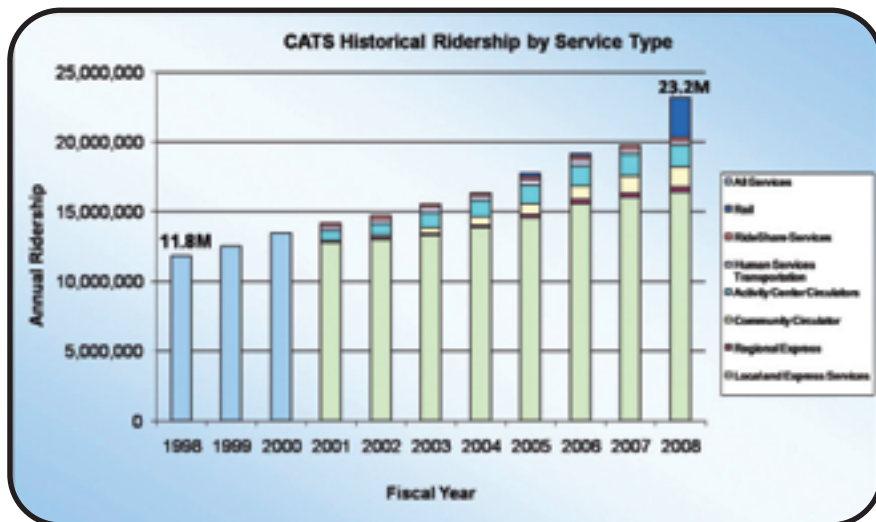
This summer was one of the most impressive for transit ridership in the Charlotte area since the days of the original streetcars. With the skyrocketing cost of gas and daily living, people are turning to CATS as a way to save money. Ridership across all services increased nearly 17% since last year and 96% since the approval of the half-cent sales tax in 1998. CATS Chief Operating Officer Jim Zingale said, "This past year, commuters made over 23 million trips on our services; that's more than 88,000 trips a day! People see CATS as a convenient, reliable and affordable alternative to their cars."

To accommodate the unprecedented increase in demand, CATS is making service enhancements to make sure we are meeting the needs of our customers. Improvements include adding and modifying routes, increasing frequency of service, and extending service hours on some routes.

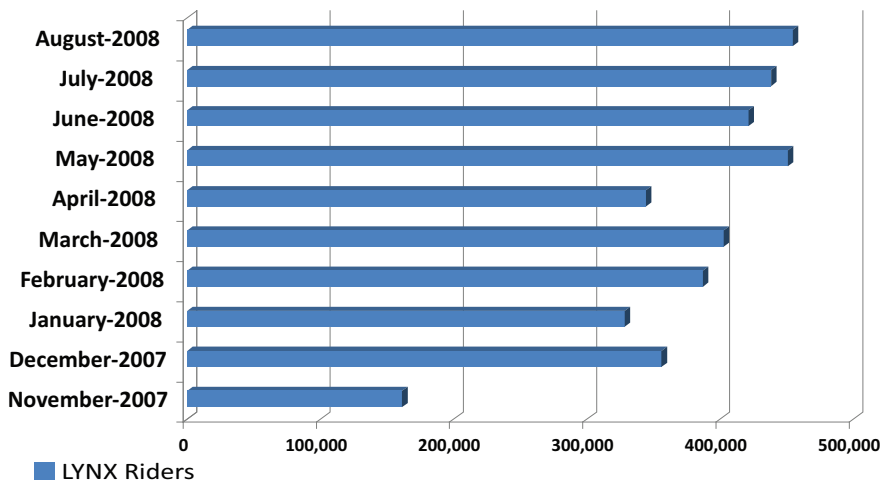
"I ride because a personal vehicle doesn't meet my needs any more than the bus," says daily rider Tom Gillam. "By riding the bus, I get more exercise, I save a ton of money, and I have a significantly smaller carbon footprint."

The addition of the LYNX Blue Line to CATS' network of services played a major role in fiscal year 2008's ridership increase. The new light rail line opened to crowds of over 100,000 people in November. Within days of its opening, LYNX exceeded its first year average daily ridership estimate. By the end of August 2008, and after operating for only nine months, almost 4 million trips were taken on the LYNX

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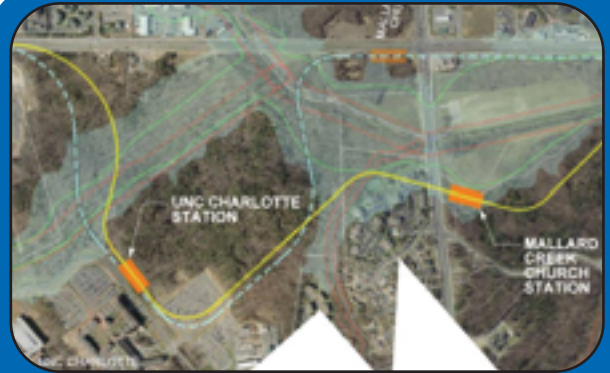
LYNX Blue Line - A Success!



Public Supports Proposed Project Changes cont.

How important are each of the following transit and planning goals to you? Participants rated each on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not Important" and 5 being "Very Important". The following is the average rating received for each item.

1. Revitalization of N. Tryon Street, including streetscape improvements	4.35
2. Redevelopment of Asian Corners	3.57
3. Serving existing neighborhoods	3.52
4. Access to stations - pedestrian	4.27
5. Access to stations - vehicular	4.04
6. Improved pedestrian environment, including sidewalks, bike lanes, crosswalks, etc.	4.64
7. Maintain access to properties along N. Tryon Street	4.04



The alternative alignment and station location for the Mallard Creek Church Station is located further east of the intersection at North Tryon Street .

A complete summary of the public workshops and a copy of the presentation can be viewed on CATS' website at www.ridetransit.org under Northeast Corridor, public meetings, past public meeting presentations and summaries. A revised alignment map can be found on the website under the project description.

CATS Finishing Draft Environmental Impact Statement



Applicants for federal funding of major transit projects are required to complete an environmental document, called a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) that examines the social, economic and environmental impacts of a proposed project. CATS is currently completing its Draft EIS for the Blue Line Extension light rail project. This study includes an inventory of existing environmental conditions, the assessment of potential positive and negative impacts of the project, and proposed mitigation to reduce any negative impacts. The Draft EIS will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act, which is a federal law that requires projects receiving federal funds to consider environmental impacts in their decision-making process. Therefore, a wide range of topics are studied in the report. Key findings of impacts for the Blue Line Extension will be included in the report.

The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the Draft EIS during a publicly advertised 45-day review period and a public hearing expected to be held in the summer 2009. Comments received during the review period and at the public hearing will be addressed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS). Upon completion and approval of the Final EIS, FTA will issue a determination that sufficient environmental analysis has been completed and will identify the locally preferred alternative. This determination, called a Record of Decision, describes the basis for the decision, identifies alternatives that were considered, and summarizes specific mitigation measures that will be incorporated into the project.

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Milestone Schedule

Proposed Blue Line Extension Light Rail Project Schedule

Activity	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)	█								
Preliminary Engineering (65% design)		█							
Record of Decision				█					
Right-of-Way Acquisition					█				
Final Design					█				
Full Funding Grant Agreement						█			
Construction							█		
Testing & Startup									█
Revenue Date									█

Note: Proposed schedule based on preliminary estimates and contingent on qualifying for federal funding.

Ridership on the RISE cont.

Blue Line, resulting in an average weekday ridership of 16,900 - that's 77% over the estimated 9,100 daily riders by the end of opening year.

"The huge ridership increase we experienced is further proof that the public made a wise decision by investing in public transportation," said Danny Rogers, Senior Project Manager for the Blue Line Extension. "Transit is particularly important now as gas prices continue to remain at high levels and our region works to meet air quality standards. Riding CATS is affordable, environmentally-friendly and less stressful than driving."

That's why more and more commuters are relying on CATS to get them where they need to go. "I would absolutely encourage everyone to ride the bus or train," says Gillam. "Some people are overwhelmed stepping out of their normal routine, so I would recommend that people start small and give it time. Ride the bus for one week and just see what happens."

What can CATS do for you? Go to www.ridetransit.org to find out.

- Use CATS Trip planner to determine your route;
- Review CATS routes and schedule to get you around town;
- Utilize the gas calculator to determine what your savings could be;
- Determine if your company participates in the Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) program, offering discounts to employers to pass the savings on to you; and
- Learn what CATS is developing for the future of Charlotte transit.

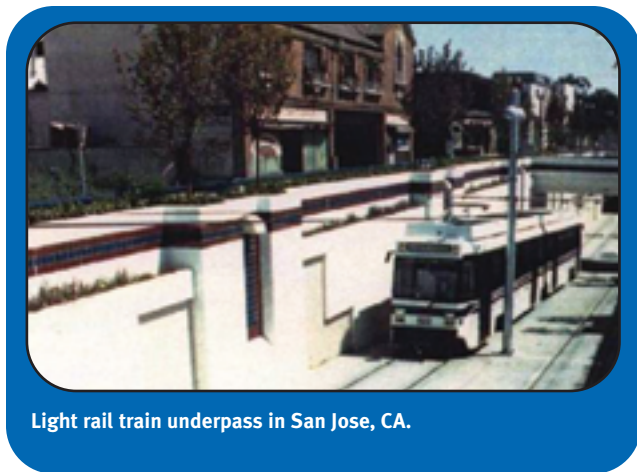
How should light rail enter and exit North Tryon Street?

As part of the preliminary engineering work, CATS is analyzing potential light rail and roadway crossings along the Blue Line Extension light rail project. Rail and roadway crossings can be at-grade (street-level) or grade separated. A grade separation is the crossing of a roadway and railroad at different elevations, such as a bridge carrying the railroad over the road or vice versa. Preliminary designs for the Blue Line Extension call for grade separations entering and exiting North Tryon. CATS is designing an overpass (bridge) entering North Tryon Street from the North Carolina Railroad or Sugar Creek alignment and a train underpass exiting North Tryon Street at UNC Charlotte. This recommendation is based on traffic and safety needs of the crossing.

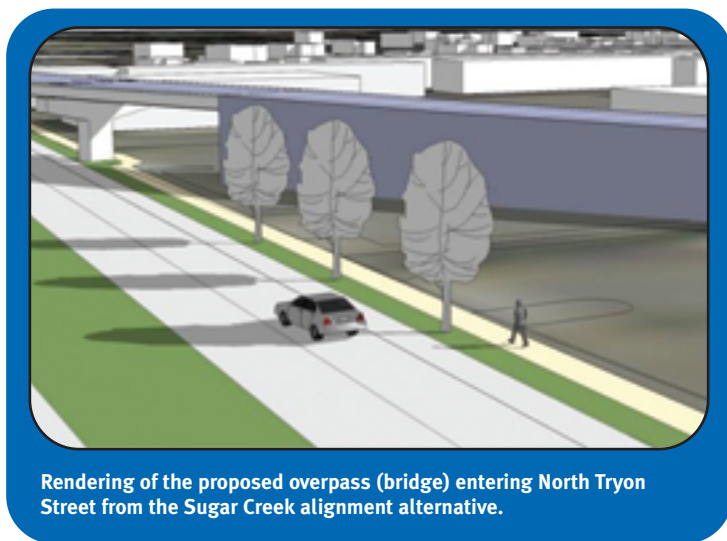
Traffic – Passenger volumes on the South Corridor LYNX Blue Line are currently approaching capacity with two-car trains every seven and a half minutes. It is anticipated that the extension will need additional capacity with three car trains and/or more frequent train service. The frequency of train service would likely impact traffic with at-grade crossings of North Tryon Street. With at-grade crossings, both trains and automobiles would travel slower. Trains would slow down at grade crossings to ensure the tracks are clear. Vehicles would be delayed due to the frequency of trains crossing North Tryon. A grade separation would allow for higher train operating speeds and improved travel times for both auto and train users.

Safety – Skewed (angled) at-grade crossings of rail to enter into the median of North Tryon Street also creates safety concerns. The distance between the gates and tracks can cause driver confusion, resulting in drivers getting caught between the gates and the tracks.

The preliminary engineering effort will include these grade separations in the 15% level design and cost estimate. Although building the grade separations would be more costly, these improvements would benefit both rail operations and traffic on North Tryon Street.



Light rail train underpass in San Jose, CA.



Rendering of the proposed overpass (bridge) entering North Tryon Street from the Sugar Creek alignment alternative.



Rendering of the proposed train underpass exiting North Tryon Street at UNC Charlotte.

Transitions

Fresh Perspectives For Northeast Corridor Art

New committee members join art advisory panel

Art-in-Transit Advisory Committee



Six new members appointed by CATS' CEO draw on their broad range of creative expertise to oversee the integration of public art in transit projects through CATS Art-in-Transit program. ATAC members appear in the order listed below.

education, community outreach, curatorial, and arts administration. Members are selected from North and South Carolina. They hold leadership positions in art-related fields, and are knowledgeable of the public art field. Their qualifications and experience are particularly important to CATS, as FTA guidelines emphasize aesthetic decision-making by art and design professionals informed by community participants in federally-funded transit art programs.

Current ATAC members include:

- Nancy M. Doll, Director, Weatherspoon Art Museum, UNCG, Greensboro, NC
- Hasaan Kirkland, Associate Professor of Fine Art, Johnson C. Smith University, Charlotte, NC
- Wim Roefs, Instructor of Contemporary African-American Art, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
- Carrie L. Gault, RA, Principal, Happy Box Architecture PLLC; Owner, Laughing Dog Studio, Charlotte NC; lecturer, College of Art + Architecture, UNC Charlotte, Charlotte, NC
- Linda Johnson Dougherty, Chief Curator & Curator of Contemporary Art, NC Museum of Art, Raleigh, NC
- Cheryl A. Palmer, Director of Education, The Mint Museums, Charlotte, NC

Right now, ATAC is focused on planning for the Northeast Corridor. Members are working with the project team to identify art opportunities along the LYNX Blue Line Extension. They are analyzing the successes and lessons learned from the South Corridor. They are developing the Call-to-Artists and recommending panelists for the artist selection process, in anticipation of moving forward with the Blue Line Extension.

Most importantly, they are monitoring CATS' Art-in-Transit program with the same diligence you would want from advisory committees in any profession, volunteering their time and service to advance the visual quality of Charlotte's mass transit system through the integration of public art.

It may look easy on the surface, but don't be fooled. Like outstanding works of art, there's more than meets the eye.

Reacting to a finished work of art is easy.

But what if evaluating the merit of a proposed – not yet built – piece of art was your responsibility? Would you have the confidence in your understanding of art to make the best possible aesthetic decisions for your community? Whose criteria would guide your recommendations? How would you advise the implementation of a comprehensive transit art program?

This is a responsibility that members of the Art-in-Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC) do not take lightly.

ATAC oversees all functions of CATS' public art program. Members are appointed to two-year terms by CATS' CEO. The committee meets regularly to review art proposals, monitor budgets, make recommendations to artist selection panels, and ensure meaningful community involvement in all aspects of the program.

This year six new members joined ATAC, leaving one pending vacancy on the seven-member committee. Collectively, they represent a broad spectrum of creative disciplines, including contemporary art, architecture,

What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

The purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is to provide a full and open evaluation of environmental issues and alternatives, and to inform decision-makers and the public of reasonable alternatives that could avoid or minimize adverse impacts and enhance the quality of the environment. The following is a list of tasks that are performed in order to prepare an EIS:

Notice of Intent and Scoping:

The EIS process begins with FTA's publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register along with similar grantee announcements in local newspapers and other media. At this step, a tentative list of alternatives and impacts is established and presented to the public and interested government agencies for comment. This notification is part of scoping - the process of affording an early opportunity for the public and agencies to identify potential issues to be addressed in the EIS. The NOI for the BLE (Northeast Corridor) was published in September 2000.



Standard Chemical Products Plant, Warehouse, East Elevation, Looking West.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement:

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is prepared in two stages - draft and final. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) provides an opportunity for government agencies and the public to review a proposed project and alternatives. The principle components of a DEIS include discussion of the following 1) the purpose of and need for action; 2) alternatives, including the proposed action; 3) the affected environment; and 4) environmental consequences.

Agency/Public Review and Comment:

Once the DEIS has been completed and signed, a notification of availability (NOA) is published in the Federal Register by FTA and advertised through local media to solicit public comment by the local lead agency. The DEIS is circulated to agencies, parties that have expressed an interest and other entities potentially affected by any of the alternatives. The circulation period must last a minimum of 45 days and a public hearing must be held with at least 15 days prior notice.



Standard Chemical Products Plant, Rendering, 1967 Research Laboratory

Final Environmental Impact Statement:

After completion of the circulation period, all substantive written comments and the public hearing testimony are addressed and the preparation of a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) begins. The principle components of the FEIS include: 1) identification of a preferred alternative; 2) responses to comments made during the circulation period; 3) commitments to mitigate adverse impacts of the project; 4) evidence of compliance with related environmental statutes, Executive Orders and regulations; and 5) a description of changes that have been made to the project since the DEIS was published. Once the appropriate FTA official has approved the FEIS, it is distributed and advertised through local media by the local lead agency.

Record of Decision (ROD):

Following the circulation period, the FTA issues a ROD, a report that states FTA's determination that NEPA has been completed for the project. The ROD describes the basis for FTA's decision, identifies alternatives that were considered, and summarizes specific mitigation measures that will

be incorporated into the project. If the project is approved, then the applicant may proceed into the Final Design and construction phases, including right-of-way acquisitions.

From the FTA website: <http://www.fta.dot.gov/>

BLUE LINE EXTENSION

TRANSITIONS SUMMER/FALL 2008

Editor: *Judy Dellert-O'Keef*
Senior Project Manager: *Danny Rogers*
Land-Use Project Manager: *Kathy Cornett*
Assistant Manager of Public
and Community Relations: *Jennifer Green*

To receive project updates via e-mail, sign up for the electronic subscription service at: www.ridetransit.org by clicking on E-mail Updates.

For more information on rapid transit planning, visit the CATS website at: www.ridetransit.org or call CATS at (704) 336-RIDE.



CATS has received a lot of positive responses from citizens at our public meetings. We appreciate your interest and welcome your questions.

The next series of meetings is anticipated to be held in early 2009. All are invited to participate!

If you would like a CATS representative to give an update at your neighborhood, community, or business association meeting, please email us at bluelineextension@ci.charlotte.nc.us

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