

Transitions

SUMMER/FALL 2010



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Working Together to Fulfill a Vision

As the Blue Line Extension (BLE) completes its 30 percent preliminary engineering design milestone, I want to share with you work staff is conducting behind the scenes to continue to advance the project. As you will read in this newsletter, CATS staff is conducting public meetings and gathering comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Draft EIS describes the LYNX Blue Line Extension Light Rail Project, explains why it is needed, discusses the environmental, physical, and socioeconomic impacts associated with the project, and lists the mitigation measures that would lessen or eliminate those impacts. I encourage you to attend one of the public meetings or read the information in the Draft EIS and provide written comments to CATS.

Over the next 12 months staff will be working on an updated cost estimate for the project and updating the engineering contract for additional scope changes to the BLE due to the High Speed Rail project and higher ridership requirements due to the success of the LYNX Blue Line. During FY2011, our current fiscal year, CATS plans to advance engineering on both the BLE and Red Line Commuter Rail projects in order to be ready to take advantage of any upswing in the sales tax or other funding options if they become available. In addition we are focusing on our core services, maintaining and expanding our customer base and enhancing the safety and security for our customers and employees.

We are also working with state leaders to provide for better public transit funding support across the state and with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Congressional leaders to seek new and innovative ways to advance the rapid transit plan. In late July, I, along with City of Charlotte Intergovernmental Liaison Dana Fenton and members of the Charlotte Chamber, traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with our local delegation. We had a good discussion on the importance of rapid transit to the growth and future of the Charlotte area and the need for continued funding to make that happen. CATS recently completed community stakeholder meetings to discuss transit investments. We plan to continue this ongoing dialogue as all of you as taxpayers are investors in the local transit system.

Nationally the vision this community initiated and is illustrated in the LYNX Blue Line has not gone unnoticed. We have had more than 35 cities and transit systems tour the line and hear about the 2030 vision, how local business, civic and elected leaders championed the initiative and how the vision became a reality. As a community we should be proud of what has been accomplished in the past 10 years.

This community set forth a vision in 1998 to provide more transportation choices, create sustainable communities and provide greater access and mobility. The citizens



Carolyn Flowers
CATS Chief Executive Officer

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



704.336.RIDE



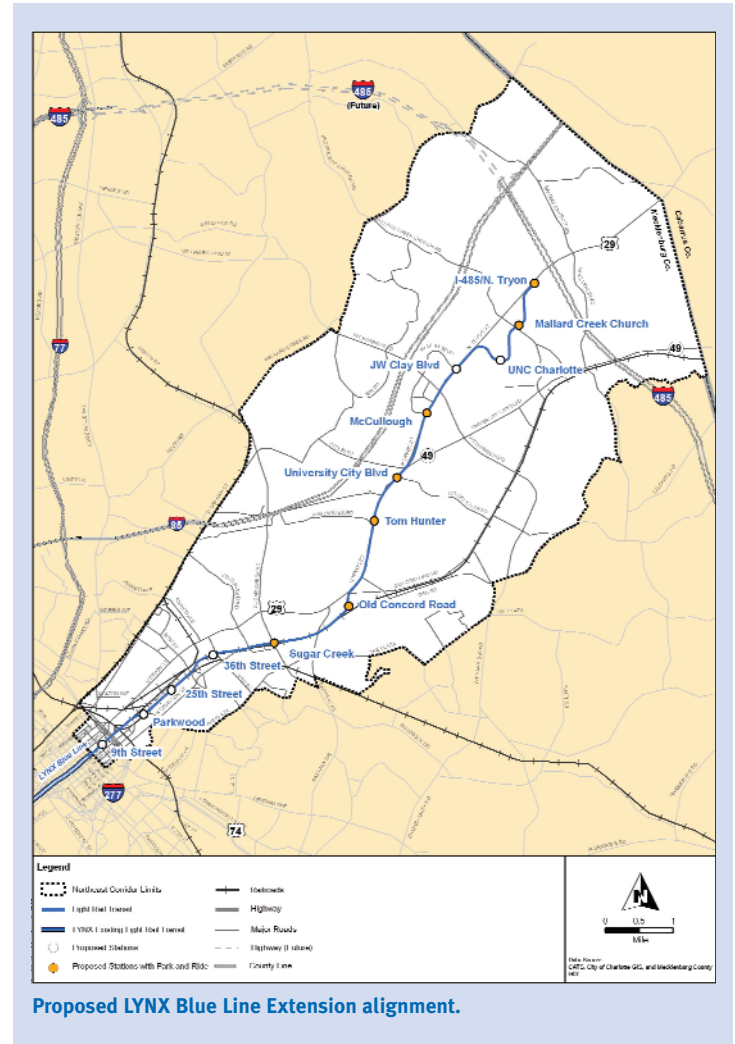
WWW.RIDETRANSIT.ORG



CATS Completes 30 Percent Design for BLE Project

The 30 percent design plans were recently completed by the preliminary engineering design consultant, STV/Ralph Whitehead Associates, for the LYNX Blue Line Extension. The design includes several significant changes to the project design since the 15 percent design was completed in April 2009.

- **VLMF and Storage Yard** – A new Vehicle Light Maintenance Facility and storage yard is proposed for the 26 light rail vehicles needed to operate the BLE. The proposed location is the site of the existing Norfolk Southern (NS) Intermodal Facility, adjacent to North Brevard Street. NS plans to move the existing intermodal facility to a site at the airport. Light maintenance activities on the light rail vehicles, those that could be done in less than 24 hours, would take place at this new facility. The existing South Boulevard Light Rail Facility would be used for heavy maintenance activities.
- **Sugar Creek Park and Ride** – Updated light rail ridership projections indicate a need for approximately 800 spaces for park and ride users at the Sugar Creek Station. Therefore, a parking deck option has been added to the project, rather than building multiple surface lots. This will also reduce the walking distance to the station for patrons.
- **North Tryon Street** – Five additional signalized intersections are proposed along North Tryon Street to improve connectivity, allow more opportunities for vehicles and pedestrians to cross North Tryon Street, and accommodate left-turn and U-turn movements. The locations added are at Orr Road, Owen Boulevard, Orchard Trace Lane, Ken Hoffman Drive and JM Keynes Drive. The project includes a total of 16 signalized grade crossings along North Tryon Street.
- **Alignment shift at UNC Charlotte** – CATS continues to coordinate the BLE project with UNC Charlotte. In 2009, UNC Charlotte requested that the alignment be shifted to the north to accommodate expansion plans for the Charlotte Research Institute. The shift resulted in a longer bridge required over Toby Creek; however, the change allows an at-grade crossing at the entrance to the Charlotte Research Institute.



The 30 percent design plans have been reviewed by City staff as well as major stakeholders. The resolution of outstanding issues for the completion of 65 percent design is now underway. As a result of this process, further refinements to the project are expected, including the addition of a light rail bridge over Mallard Creek Church Road due to higher traffic counts, changes in parking lot sizes and configurations, and a change in the location of the Sugar Creek parking deck. CATS will continue to keep you updated on proposed changes as the project moves forward.

Major Milestone Achieved! Draft Environmental Impact Statement Published

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the proposed LYNX Blue Line Extension (BLE), an 11-mile extension of the existing light rail line to serve the Northeast Corridor. The Draft EIS documents the potential impacts of the proposed project and its alternatives on the natural and human environment. The federal process provides the public with the opportunity to comment on the Draft EIS of the proposed BLE project and its potential impacts. Written comments are accepted any time during the 45-day public comment and review period which ends on October 12, 2010.

Next Steps:

CATS will analyze the comments received on the Draft EIS, conduct additional analysis as necessary and prepare the Final EIS. All public comments received as part of the formal public record will be responded to in the Final EIS.

Once the Final EIS is complete, CATS will apply for a Record of Decision (ROD) from the FTA. The ROD is a document that states the decision; identifies the alternatives considered, including the environmentally preferred alternative (alignment); and discusses mitigation plans. Upon receiving the ROD from the FTA, the proposed LYNX BLE project can then move forward to final design, right-of-way acquisition and construction.

WE INVITE YOU

CATS will hold public meetings about the Draft EIS on September 9 and September 14, and a public hearing on September 22, 2010. The same information will be presented at both public meetings and written comments will be accepted.

Public Meetings

Thursday, September 9

Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church
101 West Sugar Creek Road
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Tuesday, September 14

Oasis Shriners Center
604 Doug Mayes Place
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

If you would like to share verbal comments on the Draft EIS, the public hearing offers an opportunity to share your comments with the Metropolitan Transit Commission. Written comments will also be accepted during the hearing. If you would like to speak during the public hearing, please call 704-432-0872. Citizens may sign up to speak until 3:00 p.m. on the day of the hearing.

Official Public Hearing

Wednesday, September 22

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center
600 East 4th Street, Room 267
5:30 p.m.

CATS will provide auxiliary aids and services under the Americans with Disabilities Act for disabled persons. Translation services will be available upon request. Anyone requiring special services should contact CATS Customer Service at 704-336-RIDE (7433) least one week prior to the meeting so arrangements can be made.

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

Public participation and community input is an essential part of the decision-making process. Comments on the Draft EIS are strongly encouraged throughout the 45-day public comment period. Please provide any information, in writing, you feel would be useful to the LYNX Blue Line Extension Draft EIS. All comments received as part of the formal public record will be responded to in the Final EIS. Comments may be mailed to Judy Dellert-O'Keef, Charlotte Area Transit System, 600 East Fourth Street, 9th Floor, Charlotte, NC 28202, faxed to 704-432-2729, or e-mailed to bluelineextension@charlottenc.gov. **Written comments must be postmarked, faxed, e-mailed or hand delivered by October 12, 2010.**



BLUE LINE EXTENSION

TRANSITIONS SUMMER/FALL 2010

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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 (7433).



Working Together to Fulfill a Vision cont.

reaffirmed this vision in 2007 by a 70 percent majority. That vision remains, however today households, businesses and governmental agencies are faced with the economic realities of the recession and CATS is no different. The economic landscape has clearly changed since 2006 but our commitment to the vision has not.

This fiscal year we anticipate a sales tax level that we previously experienced in FY2005. This has a long-term affect on funding capital projects. With the new revenue base we are now projecting as much as a \$350 million gap in local funding over the next 10 years. To break this down even further, we are at a 2005 level of revenue with a 2008 level of operating expense and a 2010 level of customer demand.

We have made significant reductions in operating expenses last year and this year. The good news is that through this process we have become even more cost effective as we have managed to maintain our core service levels for the community providing equivalent service for less.

I want to thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm for expanding rapid transit in the Charlotte area. Staff is working diligently to fulfill the transit system plan vision for the future of this community. By working together we can achieve our goal of an integrated mass transit network for everyone.

Fast Facts

Benefits:

- Improved reliability and travel time savings
- More commuting choices
- Convenient commute for special events and tourism
- Increased economic development with integration of land use
- Stronger neighborhoods
- Improved roadways
- Improves air quality
- Preserves land/open space
- Creates more livable communities
- Boosts real estate values

Stations:

- 13 Stations (6 walk-up / 7 park and ride)
- Approximately 300' center or side platforms
 - Accommodates 3 car trains
- Approximately 4,800 parking spaces
- Connecting bus services

Station amenities:

- Security features
- Bicycle parking
- Public art
- Shelters, garbage cans, benches
- Trees
- Lighting
- Ticket vending machines (TVMs)
- Maps & schedules

Key activities centers along the Blue Line Extension:

- Center City Charlotte
- Blumenthal Performing Arts Center
- Time Warner Cable Arena
- ImaginOn Public Library and Children's Theatre of Charlotte
- UNC Charlotte Uptown Campus
- Historic North Davidson
- University City
- Carolinas Medical Center – University
- UNC Charlotte Main Campus