

# Transitions

WINTER 2008



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## CATS Welcomes New CEO Keith Parker

Former Assistant City Manager Keith Parker is the new Director of Public Transit for the City of Charlotte and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of CATS, one of the fastest growing transit systems in the country.

Having served as CATS' Chief Operating Officer and Deputy Director from 2000 to 2004, Parker stood out among other candidates for the job based on his vast experience and committed passion for transit. Prior to his arrival in Charlotte, Keith was the CEO for the Clark County Transit Authority in Vancouver, Washington. He also served as Assistant General Manager for the Greater Richmond Transit Company in Richmond, Virginia.

At his first job interning for a transit agency, Parker fell in love with public transportation and has kept people moving ever since. "Our citizens can look forward to our continued focus on providing affordable and efficient choices in transportation," says Parker.

**What does Parker's job entail?** He is responsible for overseeing the transit planning and transit management activities, including developing and promoting the long-term regional vision for transit services. In his CEO hat, Parker reports to the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC), which has the responsibility for approving all long-range public transportation plans, setting policy for transit planning, and making financial decisions. As Director of Public Transit he reports to the Charlotte City Manager. Parker's office, CATS' Executive Division, also provides legal support and oversight for the organization; support in fostering and maintaining relationships with local, State, and Federal governments; support to community relations and public information activities; and support to citizen and City government committees and boards concerned with public transit.

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Keith Parker  
CATS Chief Executive Officer

## Blue Line Extension receives FTA approval to enter Preliminary Engineering!

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



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# Transitions

## Movin' On Up: FTA Approves Next Phase

On November 27, 2007, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved the Charlotte Area Transit System's (CATS) request to enter Preliminary Engineering (PE) for the LYNX Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor). The FTA's funding for PE comes from the New Starts program, which is the federal government's primary financial resource to support locally planned, implemented, and operated major transit capital investments such as light rail.

During the PE phase for the Blue Line Extension, CATS will refine the locally preferred alternative and complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, including an Environmental Impact Statement. It is during PE that the project scope, schedule, budget, benefits, and impacts are established. CATS also will finalize management plans, demonstrate technical capabilities to develop the project, and commit local funding to the project. PE is typically a 15–30 month phase. Below are the guiding principles FTA has set forth for the Preliminary Engineering phase.



Some median stations on N. Tryon Street may resemble the Scaleybark Station on the LYNX Blue Line.

## Guiding Principles of Preliminary Engineering

PE provides a basis for the management of project implementation risks, including:

- Identification of all environmental impacts and making adequate provision for their mitigation in accordance with NEPA.
- Design of all major or critical project elements to the level that no significant unknown impacts relative to their costs or schedule will result.
- Completion of all cost estimating to the level of confidence necessary for the project sponsor to implement its financing strategy, including establishing the maximum dollar amount of the Federal New Starts financial contribution needed to implement the project.
- Definition of procurement requirements and strategies to deliver project service.
- Solidification of local funding commitments to the project.

Source: FTA Major Capital Transit Investment Fact Sheet at <http://www.fta.dot.gov>

## New Starts Planning and Project Development Process

Systems Planning

Alternatives Analysis

Select Locally Preferred Alternative

FTA Approval to enter into Preliminary Engineering

Preliminary Engineering

The project justification criteria required by FTA is used to demonstrate the range of benefits and impacts associated with a New Starts transit investment. The project justification criteria include the following:

- **Mobility improvements**
- **Environmental benefits**
- **Operating efficiencies**
- **Cost effectiveness**
- **Transit supportive/land use policies and future development patterns**

The FTA rates each project to signify the overall project merit. With increasing demand for federal funding for transit investments, the FTA now requires a project rating of “medium” (as opposed to “medium-low”) to qualify for future funding for New Starts projects. During PE, CATS will work with the FTA to achieve the required rating through a variety of measures including a thoroughly defined project scope, a solid project schedule, and a project budget, which CATS will be held accountable to throughout the project.

As progress is made, CATS will continuously try to identify opportunities to increase the project’s viability and efficiency. One encouraging factor that could potentially make the project more competitive is that the Northeast Corridor ridership figures may increase since the Blue Line ridership has far exceeded original projections. The Blue Line Extension light rail project is 11 miles long from Uptown to just south of I-485 in the University area, and includes 14 stations. Several characteristics distinguish the Blue Line Extension from the Blue Line (South Corridor) and are factors that contribute to the complexity of the project. The Blue Line Extension will:

1. **Require agreements with NCDOT to accommodate light rail in median of North Tryon Street;**
2. **Require agreements with four railroads, compared to one on the Blue Line (South Corridor);**
3. **Require up to twice as many right-of-way acquisitions; and**
4. **Examine environmental and engineering issues related to directly serving UNC Charlotte.**

These issues are critical elements to be addressed in PE. CATS will be assessing the project at 15%, 30%, and 65% design milestones during its engineering studies. This will help CATS develop a more informed project schedule and budget.

CATS will work closely with the FTA throughout project development. The FTA has appointed an oversight consultant, as required by the FTA procedures, to monitor and provide guidance as part of an on-going process. This requirement helps ensure the project remains viable and allows CATS to address immediately any issues that may arise during this phase. At the conclusion of PE, the FTA will meet with CATS and perform a risk assessment of the project’s scope, schedule, and budget. The quality and reliability of information assembled during PE is essential to the FTA’s decision to fund a project and give approval to advance into the next phase. One of the first tasks that the Blue Line Extension team will undertake is an updated project schedule, which will define the major milestones through Preliminary Engineering, Final Design, Construction and Operations.



The Blue Line Extension may feature split-platform stations at some intersections as seen above.

## Preliminary Engineering

FTA Approval to enter into Final Design

Final Design and Full Funding Grant Agreement

Construction

Operation

## Transit plays key role in Charlotte's Growth Strategy

Did you know that the Charlotte region's population is expected to grow to nearly 1.3 million people over the next 22 years? What is the City of Charlotte doing to prepare for this unprecedented growth? Is there a long-term plan?

We're glad you asked! We want you to know the planning that is taking place through the City's Growth Strategy initiative- planning that will carry us into the future.

Imagine our community: more quality and livable neighborhoods with plenty of housing options, greater consideration of the environment, more high quality community design, new investments in infrastructure, more pedestrian-friendly areas and much, much more. The opportunities are truly endless.

The City of Charlotte, including CATS, continues to address the needs and challenges of providing a balanced and strategic approach to Charlotte's growth, so that citizens enjoy many choices for where and how they live, work and play. These options provide variety, which helps ensure that growth improves quality of life and is sustainable now and in the future.

Through a collaborative approach including numerous departments, the City seeks efficient ways to offer mobility and responsible land use planning. The goal is to provide citizens of the region with a balanced approach to growth, including a robust transit system.

Our region's current transportation network includes an expanded bus system, community transit centers, park and ride lots, regional express routes and North Carolina's first light rail system—the LYNX Blue Line with ridership already exceeding original projections.

By having a comprehensive transportation system that includes roads, buses, carpools, vanpools, light rail, bus rapid transit, streetcar, and commuter rail as well as bikeways and sidewalks, we can offer more choices- an expanded transportation system that serves more places where a variety of activities are accessible. We can also provide more alternatives to congestion to help improve air quality, ensure successful growth and protect our quality of life.

In short, we can make the Charlotte region a better, more livable place for all of us.



Photo by The Charlotte Observer/Davie Hinshaw

As seen at the Sharon Rd West Station, the City's infrastructure program included stamped crosswalks, sidewalks, extra lighting, and bicycle lanes in the South Corridor.

### CATS Welcomes New CEO Keith Parker cont.

**How will Parker ensure success?** "I sincerely believe that CATS' success rests in our employees," says Parker. "We have to create an atmosphere of trust that rewards teamwork and innovation." Parker will work with a consulting firm to assess CATS' structure and to get a sense of how employees view the organization.

Parker also believes in frequent communication with all CATS' stakeholders: employees, elected officials, and taxpayers. Parker will begin his role as CATS' CEO the way he started with CATS in 2000. He will attend community meetings, including Rotary clubs, church groups, and neighborhood associations for feedback about the transit system. Parker believes strongly in openness. He will keep City Council and the MTC informed every step of the way as CATS moves forward with the expansion of the LYNX rapid transit services and continued improvements to and growth of the CATS bus system.

**How can you help?** You can be an active participant in the planning process by coming to public meetings, sharing your comments, and your input and feedback. "We want the community to be actively involved in the planning process for the Northeast Corridor. Areas of involvement include input on station area planning, bus service to the rail line, station design, infrastructure improvements, public art for stations and much more," says Parker.

With these opportunities for public opinion, you'll be seeing us in your community providing updates and asking for input.

**What is Parker's goal?** "I'd like CATS to become an integral part of what makes Charlotte Charlotte. I want residents to view LYNX and the whole CATS system as important an element to the City as police, fire, and the school system."



## City Council Approves Engineering Contract

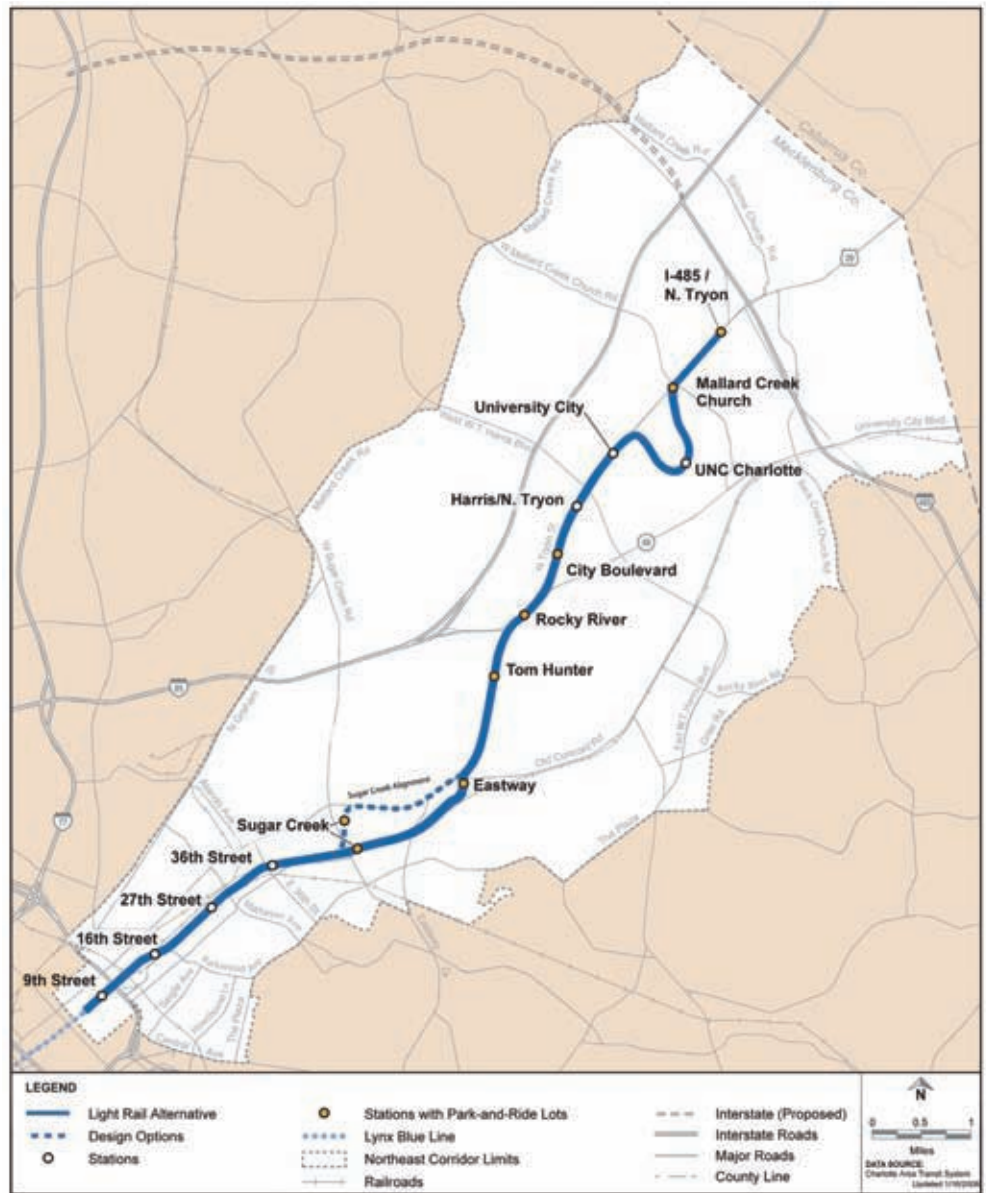
On January 28, 2008 the Charlotte City Council unanimously approved funds for CATS to move forward with design on the LYNX Blue Line Extension project. The Preliminary Engineering (PE) phase has a contract value of up to \$30 million. The project will be completed in three stages, approximately \$10 million each.

In December, an interim contract of \$500,000 was approved by the Charlotte City Council to begin initial work on the line. An additional \$9.5 million was approved in January to complete approximately 15% of the engineering and design work. Upon completion of this phase, if the project still appears viable and competitive for federal funding, then CATS will seek an additional \$10 million to take the project through 30% design. Project feasibility will again be evaluated before the final \$10 million is sought to take the project through 65% design and completion of the PE phase. CATS anticipates receipt of a federal earmark toward the preliminary engineering study. NCDOT also has committed to provide a 25% State share of the project costs to complete PE.

Once complete, the project will extend the LYNX Blue Line through northeast Charlotte, connecting businesses, neighborhoods and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.



## Blue Line Extension Map



## BLUE LINE EXTENSION

### TRANSITIONS WINTER 2008

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

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



## Time to Get Involved! Blue Line Extension Kick-off



### PUBLIC MEETINGS

**March 3, 2008**

**Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church**  
101 West Sugar Creek Road  
Fellowship Hall – 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

**March 4, 2008**

**University Place Hilton**  
8629 JM Keynes Drive  
Harris Room (lobby level) – 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm

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

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