

Blue Ribbon Committee on the Future of Wake County

Meeting Summary

**Friday, May 8, 2009
Raleigh Convention Center, 8:30 – 11:15 a.m.**

Goals/Objectives

1. To provide update on progress made since last committee meeting on October 2, 2008.
2. To provide an updated financial outlook.
3. To provide overview and discussion about Wake County's transportation/ transit plans and needs.

Welcome and Overview

BRC Co-Chairman Fred Day welcomed the committee and outlined the agenda.

Wake County Update

(Note: audio is available at wakegov.com/blueribbon)

Commissioners' Vice Chair Lindy Brown presented in place of Chairman Harold Webb, who was called out of town on family business. She provided an overview of what has happened since the group's last meeting, on October 2, 2008. Some highlights include:

- The County recently sold \$502 million in bonds, including \$300M to refund a 2008 bond anticipation note used for some school projects, libraries, Wake Tech and open space, plus another \$100M for schools, \$35M for Wake Tech and \$67M to refund 1998 bonds.
- School projects under construction in fall 2008 remain on schedule, but several other projects – including new construction, renovations, land purchases and technology upgrades – have been postponed for 1-3 years.
- At Wake Tech, bids for repairs and renovations came in \$1.5 million lower than expected and Building D at the Northern Wake Campus will open in June. The community college's enrollment for 2008-09 exceeds 70,000, five years ahead of projections used by the Blue Ribbon Committee for its studies.
- The Davie Street parking deck in downtown Raleigh opened on schedule in January, and the County opened a new Human Services Center on Millbrook Road in North Raleigh in April.
- The County has a new budget/economic web site at WakeGov.com/economy.

County Manager David Cooke provided an overview of how economic conditions have changed dramatically since the last time the Committee met. Due to changing circumstances, County leaders have decided to:

- delay open space and library projects until 2011 and courthouse construction for 12 months
- evaluate all cash-funded projects, and reevaluate the capital plan in coming months
- scale back on public school and Wake Tech construction projects
- move ahead with financing for the detention center project, with plans to issue approximately \$160 million in debt (certificates of participation).

Federal Stimulus Package

(Note: audio is available at wakegov.com/blueribbon, beginning at about 30:40)

Dempsey Benton, former Raleigh city manager and most recently secretary of the North Carolina Health and Human Services Department, talked about implementing North Carolina's share of the \$787-billion federal stimulus bill in his current job as **director of the Office of Economic Recovery & Investment**. He said the bill's goal is threefold: to stabilize state government budgets, provide an economic safety net and create jobs. He said North Carolina would see about \$8 billion in opportunities for investment, and outlined various programs receiving funds, including education, public housing repairs and renovations, workforce development, energy conservation, highways and transit, water and wastewater projects, and research and development projects.

He told the committee that North Carolina would “see a big impact” from this stimulus package, but that his office faces many challenges and deadlines for managing the funds, and developing proposals and guidelines. He said his office is committed to transparency and openness, and to being efficient.

Reality Check Planning Process

(Note: audio is available at wakegov.com/blueribbon, beginning at about 1:14)

Smedes York, BRC committee member and president of Triangle Tomorrow, highlighted results of the Reality Check regional planning process and discussed the next steps in the implementation process. Information is available at www.realitycheck2009.org or by contacting Pam Wall at 919-840-7372 ext 24 or pwall@researchtriangle.org.

Panel: Transportation/Transit Update

(Note: No audio is available for this session.)

Moderator **Kirsten Weeks of Cisco and 2009 RTA Advocacy Chair** noted that transit was one of the three core principles that emerged from Reality Check. She highlighted the business community’s continued support of transit investments as essential to preserving our quality community and ability to attract and retain top talent.

Rep. Deborah K. Ross highlighted the progress of House Bill 148, which passed the House with a strong, bipartisan margin, noting the support from varied constituencies.

Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker highlighted the ongoing planning efforts within the City and County, including the plans for density at key transit nodes in the Raleigh Comprehensive Plan.

Capital Area MPO Chair and Wake County Commissioner Joe Bryan also highlighted planning efforts within the MPO and the planned commitment of billions of dollars to highways and transportation, although a multi-billion dollar funding gap still exists. He noted that local option for transit and the tolls to complete 540 would help close that gap.

Triangle Transit General Manager David King echoed the responses of the other panelists and noted the importance of creating plans that were rational for both Wake County and fit within a broader regional context.

Kirsten Weeks then highlighted some positive results for the future of transit in our market based on a poll recently conducted by the Regional Transportation Alliance. The poll results are available on the Blue Ribbon web site at www.wakegov.com/blueribbon or the RTA web site www.letsgetmoving.org.

Attendees were asked to complete a brief one-page survey about transportation. Some highlights include:

- Bus service was listed most frequently for inclusion in referendum package, followed closely by light rail.
- The first priority travel corridors were from Downtown Raleigh to both RDU and RTP.
- Respondents felt that the transit vote should be held separately from school bond by more than a 2:1 margin.
- Respondents listed a variety of communication methods, with TV, Internet and speaker’s bureau cited most often.
- Regarding the reasons to implement public transit, "Less traffic congestion" and "Economic development" were each cited by 75% of respondents, with the former ranked as the higher priority. "Better air quality and environmental preservation" was the next most frequently mentioned benefit.

Other comments were: Needs strong support from major employers in the region, this is a vital component to future quality growth, the more we wait the more it will cost, and we need to stress bus and rail.

Conclusion and Next Meeting

Committee Co-Chair Fred Day thanked members for remaining engaged in the community’s crucial issues, particularly in these tough economic times. He said committee leaders would announce the date and location of the next Blue Ribbon Committee meeting later.

Next Meeting: Fall 2009, date and location to be determined.