

Wake County Transit Panel 2013
Transit Partners Session
November 12, 2013
Marbles Kids Museum
Wake County Staff Notes - Full Discussion

Introduction

Mr. Tim Maloney, Director of Wake County's Planning, Development and Inspections Division, called the session to order and thanked everyone for attending. Mr. Maloney asked the audience members to raise hands if they had not attended the morning session. Mr. Maloney stated that based on the number of hands he would reintroduce the panel members quickly.

Mr. Maloney introduced the three panelists:

Mr. Steve Polzin, PHD is currently the Transit Research Program Director at the Center for Urban Transportation Research housed at the University of South Florida in Tampa. Mr. Polzin has work experience in Transportation and Transit Planning in varied areas nationally including Cleveland and Dallas. Mr. Polzin has extensive hands on experience in transit planning – including bus and rail planning. Mr. Polzin has evaluated the economic aspects of transit, as well as organizational and coordination issues (that will be referred to as governance issues in transit panel discussions). Mr. Polzin is a member of the local Transit Board in Tampa where he attempts to take things from the world of academics to day to day operations.

Mr. Sam Staley, PHD is an economist by training. Mr. Staley is currently the Managing Director of the DeVoe L. Moore Center at Florida State University in Tallahassee. Mr. Staley serves as a Senior Research Fellow for the Reason Foundation – with a focus on land use and mobility issues. Mr. Staley has published multiple works on transportation, land use, congestion and economic development that detail case studies and solutions from areas nationally and internationally. Mr. Staley has organized multiple national conferences focused on reframing discussions, public private partnerships and working with the markets to achieve more. Mr. Staley has evaluated transit and roadway investments and made important connections to land use impacts.

Mr. Cal Marsella is a public administrator by training. Mr. Marsella is currently retired and operating as an independent consultant, he previously served as the General Manager of the Denver Regional Transportation District. Mr. Marsella has experience running and operating transit systems in Denver, Connecticut and Florida. In Denver, Mr. Marsella worked with the Denver Regional Transportation District's eight county elected governing board to implement the plan approved by voters. Mr. Marsella also helped Denver explore new ways of funding and structuring projects to speed service delivery and save on overall costs.

Transit Partners Introductions

Mr. Maloney asked the transit partner representatives at the head table to identify themselves and briefly describe the organization they represent.

Mr. Scott Saylor stated he was the President of the North Carolina Railroad Company. Mr. Saylor stated the North Carolina Railroad company is in charge of a 317 mile railroad that runs from Charlotte to the port in Morehead City. Mr. Saylor noted that 29 miles of the railroad are located in Wake County.

Mr. Ray Boylson stated he was the Transit Administrator for the Town of Cary. Mr. Boylson stated the Town of Cary system is one of the smaller transit systems, but a growing system, within Wake County. Mr. Boylson stated the Cary transit system has 30 vehicles that provide fixed route and demand response service in the Town of Cary.

Mr. David King stated he was the General Manager for Triangle Transit. Mr. King stated Triangle Transit provides express transit service to Chapel Hill, Durham, the Research Triangle Park, the Raleigh Durham Airport as well as Raleigh and many of the outlying communities of the Raleigh area. Mr. King stated that Triangle Transit has been working with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and local communities of the Triangle Region to develop county based transit plans as part of the regional transit plan. Mr. King stated two of the three county plans have already been adopted and approved by voters. Mr. King noted that Triangle Transit and the Triangle Transit Board of Trustees had been referenced in the governance discussion at the morning transit panel session.

Mr. Joe Milazzo stated he was Executive Director of the Regional Transportation Alliance. Mr. Milazzo stated the Regional Transportation Alliance was a regional program of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Milazzo stated the Regional Transportation Alliance had over 100 business members and 23 member chamber of commerce organizations in 10 Counties in Central and Eastern North Carolina.

Ms. Karen Rindge stated she was the Executive Director of Wake Up Wake County. Ms. Rindge stated Wake Up Wake County was a citizens group for good growth planning and sustainable communities. Ms. Rindge stated that although many of functions of Wake Up Wake County were centered in Wake County they dealt with regional issues. Ms. Rindge stated she was also representing the Capital Area Friends of Transit. Ms. Rindge stated the Capital Area Friends of Transit was a coalition of over 40 state and local agencies, over a 100 civic leaders and over 1000 community members who all want the area to move forward with multi-modal transit options.

Ms. Vivian Jones stated she was the Mayor of Wake Forest. Ms. Jones stated she was representing the Wake County Mayors Association.

Mr. Ed Johnson stated he was the Executive Director of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization. Mr. Johnson stated the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization represented all of Wake County and portions of Franklin County, Granville County, Harnett County and Johnston County. Mr. Johnson stated the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization area represented 1.1 million people which accounts for 12% of the population of the State of North Carolina. Mr. Johnson stated he was born in Durham and spent many years working locally with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and the City of Raleigh. Mr. Johnson stated although the area has a good network and good capacity today his concern is how to sustain the quality if the 1.2 million more people projected to move the area arrive. Mr. Johnson stated the past growth rates in the area suggest that the future growth is very possible.

Mr. David Eatmon stated he was the Transit Administrator for the City of Raleigh. Mr. Eatmon stated the City of Raleigh operated the Capital Area Transit system which provided fixed route and paratransit transit services. Mr. Eatmon stated the City of Raleigh is a partner in the regional transportation demand management initiative.

Panelist Observations

Mr. Maloney asked the panelists to summarize any observations about the morning session with the Wake County Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Marsella stated that several common themes had been expressed in the morning session. Mr. Marsella stated that congestion metrics (time and delay) for the Wake County area are not bad relative to other areas of the country. Mr. Marsella stated the ridership expectations shown in the draft Wake County Transit plan are curious. Mr. Marsella stated he had questions how the ridership would go from what it is today on the existing bus routes to what it is expected to be in the future (much higher) on the proposed rail investment. Mr. Marsella stated the numbers could be possible based on very high population growth but are not linear based on today's ridership.

Mr. Marsella stated the cost for the commuter rail investment seems understated (for what would actually be required to run a high capacity service). Mr. Marsella stated the low ridership numbers [that are projected] are a concern. Mr. Marsella stated the shared track [with freight] design was also a concern since it limited the area's control and ability to provide service (frequency) as needed. Mr. Marsella noted the investment proposed for the commuter rail seemed to be a lot of money for not a lot of ability to run good transit service.

Mr. Marsella stated the draft Wake County Transit Plan's bus elements proposed extending routes into lower density areas. Mr. Marsella stated these services might make sense politically but are very hard to make work ridership wise or financially. Mr. Marsella stated the services are especially hard to justify off peak (mid-day or after six PM) as ridership drops off. Mr. Marsella stated the area should consider alternative service delivery methods (not fixed routes, demand response) since so many areas are lower density areas.

Mr. Marsella stated it was good to see the energy in the community around transit planning but the draft Wake County Transit Plan is a concern. Mr. Marsella stated he looks at the business aspects of the transit plan more than the other factors (community building, development). Mr. Marsella stated the draft Wake County Transit Plan spends a lot of money but does not have a strong positive impact on the community (increasing ridership and bolstering the financial health of the overall system).

Mr. Staley stated that the Wake County Board of Commissioners' and other's desire to take another look at the draft Wake County Transit Plan made a lot of sense. Mr. Staley stated that having numbers (ridership and costs) that do not meet expectations can halt transit planning for decades. Mr. Staley stated the agencies that support the incorrect numbers can lose legitimacy. Mr. Staley stated the numbers should be as accurate as they can be.

Mr. Staley stated it was positive that the Wake County Board of Commissioners seemed open to an incremental or strategic approach. Mr. Staley stated in an area of Wake County's size it was problematic to think that one project or a large vision could fix current and future problems. Mr. Staley noted it was important for the area to understand what could be phased in over time and then assess how these individual components supported the overall transit network.

Mr. Staley stated that although urban transportation networks are made up of a layering of different modes, not every area is "ready" for each type of mode. Mr. Staley stated the area needed to assess where it truly was on the transit need scale and what investments it could viably support. Mr. Staley stated that the Raleigh-Durham area is a mid-sized urban area with (low traffic congestion and) very poly-centric employment. Mr. Staley stated the area would continue to grow in population but it was difficult to determine what the development trends would most look like. Mr. Staley stated that incremental transit investments, judged for performance after implementation, provide a good way meet actual demand as the area matures.

Mr. Staley stated it is important to note that there seem to be real challenges in coordinating and getting agreements and information between the different agencies charged with planning transit in this area. Mr. Staley stated that developing a shared vision and mission is going to take a lot more work.

Mr. Polzin stated that even though each of the panelists reviewed elements of the plan prior to attending, none of them claim to be "experts" on all of the details. Mr. Polzin stated the panelist's comments are more thematic in approach assessing whether the pieces of the plan make sense based on the area's characteristics. Mr. Polzin stated the panelist's developed independent but complementary assessments of the draft Wake County Transit Plan (all panelists had concerns).

Mr. Polzin stated that one of the key recommendations that came out of the panel was that the area should be innovative. Mr. Polzin stated that the transit industry, which has been stable for decades, has seen a lot of experimentation and changes in recent years. Mr. Polzin stated many properties (transit agencies) across the country are experimenting with technology, vehicle types, vehicle amenities, utilization, service delivery

schemes, role of the private sector and coordination of transit and land use. Mr. Polzin stated it was important for Wake County clearly understand the new transit innovations and seriously consider applicability rather than just following the path of a preferred transit agency or preconceived ideas. Mr. Polzin stated many of the new innovations when presented as complete transit service vision can be very exciting and can motivate tax payers to support funding.

Mr. Polzin stated that Wake County's existing transit ridership was very modest (low). Mr. Polzin stated that other areas that had implemented rail projects (Phoenix, Dallas and Minneapolis) had bus system ridership numbers 2, 3, or 10 times the amount of Wake County currently when they started investing in rail. Mr. Polzin stated Charlotte had lower numbers than the other communities mentioned but higher than what Wake County has today. Mr. Polzin stated the challenge with implementing rail "too early" was that the market would not utilize the line enough to support the investment (cost effective and productive), but also not enough to accomplish other goals (save energy, attract choice riders to the system overall). Mr. Polzin stated utilization and related cost recovery factors were key to assessing the "risk" of a project.

Mr. Polzin stated the area should carefully assess whether proposed projects accomplished goals with an appropriate amount of "risk" and take a "pragmatic" approach to transit services and travel behavior. Mr. Polzin stated there is a lot of recent research on actual travel and ridership behavior. Mr. Polzin stated easy paper surveys tend to over represent how many people will use transit based purely on "mode bias" (preference for rail) and in reality many of these individuals will continue to use automobiles for most trips. Mr. Polzin stated the area should look at the research on actual behavior and how this will relate to actual utilization (public will to use the system) when choosing how to augment the existing system. Mr. Polzin stated it may be unrealistic to assume that ridership will respond in Wake County as it has in other more mature transit areas.

Mr. Polzin stated "incremental" expansion of transit is prudent. Mr. Polzin stated that "incremental" and "experimental" investments as product are challenging to communicate to the public. Mr. Polzin stated the public typically wants to know what it will get for investment. Mr. Polzin stated that policy makers typically respond by creating a long term (30 year) plan of service. Mr. Polzin stated that changes are occurring so fast in transit and transportation it is very uncertain that plans developed today will even make sense in the next decade. Mr. Polzin stated that, aside from the technology changes, the funding issues and concerns on a Federal level (more competition in transit specifically and deficit spending concerns more generally) are contributing to uncertainty. Mr. Polzin stated in general everyone can expect less (matching shares) than what systems received historically but exactly how much less is uncertain. Mr. Polzin stated that "incremental" investments need to be grounded in "spending money wisely" and "responding to reality" (specific investments make sense (or not) if certain things happen) to avoid concerns of uncoordinated investment. Mr. Polzin stated the "incremental" investments need to be tied to a system wide strategy (vision) and continued growth in ridership (build markets).

Mr. Polzin stated the draft Wake County Transit Plan should be re-looked at. Mr. Polzin stated that with the advances in Bus Rapid Transit and bus in managed lanes, a credible Wake County Transit Plan must compare these options side by side with other proposals (especially fixed guideway rail). Mr. Polzin stated the area should also be willing to plan for investment (rail) that would occur in later decades of the plan. Mr. Polzin stated the area should carefully look at transit investments and know why certain things should be done now and what could be done later. Mr. Polzin stated the area should have a plan that is "robust against" [valid, flexible, not over committed] various potential demographic and travel futures. Mr. Polzin stated that lots of trends, including demographics, commuting, population growth are changing from historic trends and transit systems must adapt to this trends to be competitive and beneficial.

Transit Partner Questions

David King asked the panel to address why they felt transit investment in I-40 (through RTP) made more sense than investing the parallel State owned rail corridor. Mr. King stated that the existing express bus routes in this area carried about 1500 riders per day and ridership is growing about 10-15% per year. Ed Johnson stated the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's and North Carolina Department of Transportation's current investment plan already calls for managed lane "like" investment in I-40 in the future (by 2040).

[The panelists agreed that managed lane and other co-investment with highways offered a way to help pay for (with tolls from vehicles or highway money) the required major investment while the area built transit ridership. The panelists stated that the transit service using the managed lanes would probably be faster and more able to address actual origins and destinations than service using rail. The panelists stated commuter rail works best where upfront costs are relatively low and service patterns are relatively simplistic]. Mr. Polzin stated the appeal of managed lanes is that the system can bill cars for the capacity the transit is not using. Mr. Polzin noted that commuter services especially run infrequently [commuter rail as proposed every 30 minutes] and this leaves a lot of capacity (that has to be constructed and paid for) unused. Mr. Polzin stated that sharing these costs across modes made a lot of sense. Mr. Polzin stated buses on managed lanes have guaranteed travel speeds, good reliability [since the lanes are priced to limit congestion] and potentially better ability to address origin and destination needs. Mr. Polzin noted that all transit systems must look at door to door travel costs. Mr. Polzin stated that buses on managed lanes can leave the lane and potentially reduce the costs associated with last mile of service issues (circulators, links to other services, parking).

Mr. Polzin stated that new commuter rail programs are starting in the United States but these are typically in areas where corridor access can be established cheaply. Mr. Polzin stated these systems are typically in special event markets, simple link corridors, or have attributes where they have specific advantages over other transportation options. Mr. Polzin stated even in these markets the costs per trip on commuter rail are still very high. Mr. Polzin stated that all investment (parking, stations, bus links) needed to bring people to the rail and get them to destinations needed to be included in the cost of the system. Mr. Polzin noted commuter rail typically has lower travel speeds (operating speeds) than buses in managed lanes

Mr. Marsella stated that managed lanes were not the only transit investments that can be linked to highway investment. Mr. Marsella stated the TrEx project in Denver had constructed a light rail corridor adjacent to the interstate. Mr. Marsella stated the highway was able to address needs (capacity, flooding, shoulders) and the rail system was able to share on infrastructure costs. Mr. Marsella stated the public approval ratings for the project are very high and the project saved \$33 million. Mr. Marsella stated today the light rail regularly passes vehicles in congestion and this is great advertisement for transit.

(Mr. King clarified his question noting that an MPO supported regional panel had recommended the existing transit proposals [in the draft Wake County Transit Plan] are focused on a goal of planning for and getting ahead of expected population growth. Mr. King stated the speed of population growth in the region has been very fast and it is expected to continue. Mr. King stated that major infrastructure takes time to build and that is why the plan is being considered now

Mr. King stated that the draft Wake County Transit Plan calls for bus improvement in the first 5 years of the plan and these bus services are proposed where demand is already strong. Mr. King stated the Wake County side can cover commuter rail without federal funding. Mr. King stated constructing managed lanes in I-40 will be very expensive and the managed lanes cannot take any of the general purpose lane capacity currently operating.)

(Mr. Johnson stated a TrEx concept had not been looked at along I-40. Mr. Johnson stated the I-95 rebuild costs were estimated to be around \$30 million a mile.)

Joe Milazzo asked the panel to address the transit challenges of a region with multiple employment centers (polycentric) and asked how these challenges should relate to investment (mode, speed of investment).

[The panelists agreed the character (walkability, density) of the areas to be served pose a bigger challenge than the number or distance between the centers. The panel stated flexible and responsive services should be considered because how the area will look and operate as it matures is not certain.] Mr. Polzin stated that polycentric areas are a challenge for transit mostly based on historical service assumptions (commute from suburbs to downtown) rather than actual concerns. Mr. Polzin stated true polycentric areas can actually provide transit service advantages because they eliminate empty return trips associated with heavy downtown work patterns (in the morning and then reverse in afternoon). Mr. Polzin stated the concern is that people make mode decisions when they leave home so either origin or destination (preferably both) must be transit “friendly” to make a transit trip competitive. Mr. Polzin stated traditional downtowns (central business districts) are “transit friendly” because they have sidewalks, limited parking, lunch options and a dense collection of businesses.

Mr. Polzin stated transit becomes a challenge when an employment destination is a campus environment with lots of parking. Mr. Polzin stated these are the employment areas (campus) preferred by many of the growing business areas (healthcare) currently. Mr. Polzin stated there are transit systems that can work but they need to be flexible since these campus areas tend to be more fluid (major employment may shift from one area to another) than central business districts. Mr. Staley stated research suggests the suburban housing market is also very fluid. Mr. Staley stated residential populations (in Las Vegas) have shown a great propensity to move to different locations based on congestion, costs, and other factors. Mr. Staley stated that “walkable” communities tend to retain residents better than other areas, but this does not necessarily translate to transit use since it very easy for people to use cars for non-walkable trips. Mr. Staley stated developing transit in this area is very tough because people will be on the same section of roadway for very different reasons (different origin, destination, trip type, trip frequency).

Mr. Marsella stated that all transit investments are unique. Mr. Marsella stated the Denver area has had success with employer run shuttles. Mr. Marsella stated these shuttles are great because the employers know their employees work schedules and other needs.

Ms. Rindge asked the panel if they had taken into account the changes in land use that the community has planned for and fully expects to occur into in their critique of the draft Wake County Transit Plan.

[The panelists agreed that aspirational goals on land use and transit investment are helpful, however, planning on both aspects (land use and transit) cannot and should not be separated from the market and verifiable trends. The panelists stated the future ridership numbers in the corridor seem high and even if they are accurate the projects (commuter rail and light rail) would have trouble justifying cost or competing for federal money]. Mr. Polzin stated the panelists were not charged with critiquing the details of the plan and if the community is serious about the investments proposed it should bring in experts to carefully look at the numbers. Mr. Polzin stated that most every community is planning for dense and walkable communities, the problem is whether they will actually be constructed and if so will they be dense and focused enough to generate the ridership expected. Mr. Polzin stated there are many areas that can double the density they are today and still be a third as dense as they need to be. Mr. Polzin stated this is not a critique on good land use planning or appropriate density it is just math. Mr. Polzin stated only a certain percentage of all trips will utilize any transit mode and a lot of people need to be in an area to generate high ridership.

Mr. Staley stated that the research does not support the automatic assumption that all apartment or condominium residents will be regular transit users. Mr. Staley stated many residents who chose to live in higher density areas will still use cars to get around for most trips. Mr. Staley stated the lack of direct and clear relationship between density and transit use and the fact that the market determines the best place to build

density make it very challenging to build transit ridership with land use. Mr. Polzin stated even some of the current trends that seem positive for density (increased construction of apartments, “millennial” generation’s preference for downtown amenities) are only marginal (small numbers) shifts in a very large market and uncertain how long they will last.

Mr. Marsella stated if a community wanted to change land use it should use tools outside of transit to make it happen. Mr. Marsella stated in his experience replacing a bus line with light rail will yield a 30% ridership bump. Mr. Marsella stated the problem is in Wake County if you look at the ridership on the existing bus route and add the 30% it still does not meet Federal expectations for funding. Mr. Marsella stated the expectations for ridership seem unrealistic, further noting that the Denver Regional Transportation District had decided to construct projects that perform better than the Wake County lines without using federal funding (with the assumption that these projects would not compete well).

Mr. Polzin stated building heavy transit infrastructure expecting population and land use change was like “young newlyweds buying a large house so the grandkids will have someplace to sleep at Christmas”. Mr. Polzin stated an area should look how far ahead of the market it wants to be and balance aspirations with risk. Mr. Polzin stated the long term financial “carrying costs” of transit can be very high. Mr. Polzin stated incremental strategies can minimize upfront investment and provide a clear path to reaching aspirations when appropriate. Mr. Polzin stated that rail locks the community down geographically and technologically and this leads to future risk. Mr. Polzin stated it was important not the cherry-pick mostly successful light rail programs but also look at areas where the investment had not been as successful as hoped.

(Ms. Rindge clarified her question noting that the draft Wake County Transit Plan has an incremental and multimodal approach. Ms. Rindge stated the draft Wake County Transit Plan proposes to expand bus, add commuter rail and construct light rail only if federal funds are available. Ms. Rindge stated this approach which presented a vision of how transit would work over time was key to being able to “sell” the plan. Ms. Rindge stated that the fixed rail components of the plan are very popular with the public. Ms. Rindge noted the communities around the rail lines are changing zoning and land use to allow transit supportive densities.)

Scott Saylor asked the panelists to expand further on concerns about running commuter rail on tracks shared with freight.

[The panelists agreed that dual interest in the corridor could lead to passenger service being less responsive to demand than needed]. Mr. Marsella stated that in past interactions with freight rail companies they had no incentive to allow passenger service to change as required to meet demand. Mr. Marsella stated this concern led at least to a delay in service expansion and typically resulted in additional lease, insurance or liability costs. Mr. Marsella stated an important passenger route with a third party with veto control was problematic.

Scott Saylor asked the panel to address if they felt long commuter rail lines led to urban sprawl.

[The panelists agreed that commuter rail only had slight impacts on sprawl. The panelists stated communities should carefully consider the implicit “subsidies” they are providing with any and all transit investments]. Mr. Staley stated that because commuter rail changes relative access it changes the market and could contribute to people moving to new areas. Mr. Polzin stated that commuter rail’s reliance on park and ride lots limits the land use changes around the station areas and limits direct relationships with sprawl. Mr. Polzin stated traditional commuter rail systems (higher paid white collar workers commuting to cheaper houses in suburban areas) do raise concerns about equity and subsidies. Mr. Polzin stated the term “commute to work” comes from rail as companies commuted (cut or reduced) fares for people riding to the end of the line. Mr. Polzin stated these early rail networks understood that they were cutting rates to boost overall ridership but systems today are less clear why they offer discount (price per mile) fares to long distance commuters. Mr. Polzin stated the community may want to carefully consider how far they want to “encourage” people to commute from.

Mr. Marsella stated that other trends, including the lower prices of houses further from the center of the community, are much more directly related to sprawl than rail. Mr. Marsella stated from a transit perspective these people are potential riders and the agency needs to evaluate whether there is an effective way to provide service.

(Mr. Saylor clarified his questions noting that the North Carolina Rail Road Company and the State of North Carolina owns the right-of-way. Mr. Saylor stated there are provisions in the contract with Norfolk Southern to allow commuter rail if capacity exists. Mr. Saylor referenced the “sprawl support” concerns that had been leveled against the Virginia Railway Express.)

Ed Johnson asked the panel to expand on perceived or actual problems with operating passenger service in a working freight railroad.

[The panelists agreed that freight rail and passenger services generally do not have the same business needs. The panelists stated the freight rail lines typically restrict passenger service or charge for capacity or liability as a result of these conflicting needs. The panelist stated a community should have clear understanding that commuter rail is the best and most cost effective solution before pursuing this option.] Mr. Marsella stated in Denver (on the line to Boulder) the railroad was profitable and generally uninterested and unwilling to plan for commuter services. Mr. Marsella stated the railroad held all the cards in the negotiations and the price for access was extremely high (entire project cost \$1.2 Billion). Mr. Marsella stated the cost per rider (8,600 to 10,000 riders per day expected) on this system was very high especially since it competes with a Bus Rapid Transit system on an adjacent roadway that has a much lower cost per rider.

Mr. Polzin stated that passenger service on existing rail lines seems logical geographically as both uses need linear facilities. Mr. Polzin stated this logic almost always breaks down when the two sides address capacity, liability and goals. Mr. Polzin stated freight rail line is not always the best location for the dense developments that occur around passenger services and the rail operating companies are very concerned (\$) about the liability their system is exposed to. Mr. Polzin stated the insurance on a trolley and freight rail at grade crossing in Tampa costs around one dollar per passenger trip.

(Ed Johnson clarified his question stating that even though the railroad is state owned he has increasing skepticism that it is the right place for passenger transit investment. Mr. Johnson stated the light rail added even more complexity since there were differences of opinion in how far the light rail tracks needed to be from the freight rail tracks. Mr. Saylor stated the North Carolina Railroad Company had less concern with commuter rail than light rail.)

[A break was taken]

Ms. Jones asked the panel to comment on potential next steps to address transit governance issues. Ms. Jones specifically asked which agency should lead the transit effort.

[The panelists agreed that governance next steps could be very complex and labor intensive. The panelists stated that finding points of agreement and developing shared goals and objectives are very important. The panelists stated that numerous agencies could lead this effort but the lead agency must be ready for an intensive and honest process.] Mr. Marsella stated that any governance set up could work if the fundamentals are in place. Mr. Marsella stated the fundamentals are truly listening to all members of the community, establishing a clear direction based on community needs and following through on commitments with business principles. Mr. Marsella stated the initiatives in the Denver area worked because of these elements. Mr. Marsella stated that Orange, Durham and Wake Counties all have different concerns and it is important to understand what each community wants. Mr. Marsella stated that politics can and will influence decisions but it is important to have this influence grounded in actual metrics.

Mr. Polzin stated with many agencies having de facto veto authority establishing or verifying governance in the region will be complex and take time. Mr. Polzin stated the area should build the time needed to address governance into the transit decision making process. Mr. Polzin stated efforts to map out and agree on how decisions are made and when would be very beneficial to future investment efforts. Mr. Polzin stated the Federal New starts process would be very difficult to manage without this understanding.

Mr. Staley stated that someone or some group has to step up and address governance issues. Mr. Staley stated that focusing on key areas of agreement and areas of common ground are important first steps. Mr. Staley stated the area should identify key decision-makers and develop the scope of what needs to be accomplished. Mr. Staley stated the area needs to collaborate and establish a set of shared goals and values. Mr. Staley stated parties should approach the effort with humility and try very hard to understand what others needed. Mr. Staley stated there is no magic formula. Mr. Staley stated that the plan will spend billions of dollars over decades so it is appropriate to have the right governance.

Mr. Polzin repeated that the scope of the plan (billions of dollars) warranted the effort to establish the right governance. Mr. Polzin stated the area cannot be apologetic about the need to get governance right regardless of the time it might take. Mr. Marsella stated the area should be looking for a worthy plan that had wins for everybody. Mr. Marsella stated the area had time to develop the right plan based on its relatively low congestion levels. Mr. Polzin stated that the alternative to addressing governance, essentially buying concurrence by promising whatever it took to get the plan adopted would likely lead to reckless and financially unsupportable plan.

(Ms. Jones clarified her statements noting that a lot of entities want to be involved in decision making. Ms. Jones also noted that the equity concerns are greater in Wake County than the other two counties.)

Ed Johnson asked the panel to address how transit governance representation could be made more “proportional”.

[The panelists agreed that focusing the governance on an agreed upon and understood mission and requiring that valid numbers and assumptions were used was the best way to “fix” governance. The panelists noted proportional boards could have an easier time developing a plan the community would accept.] Mr. Marsella stated the Denver area has 3 million people in 35 cities within 8 counties. Mr. Marsella noted that the proportional makeup of the Denver area’s board allowed the agency to come up with a plan and shared vision that the community could get behind. Mr. Marsella stated the Denver Plan found the appropriate balance between proposing transit lines that would be productive with ensuring that many people saw a direct benefit. Mr. Marsella noted it was very helpful to have the TrEx light rail trains operating in the highway right-of-way (at the time of the funding referendum) because even drivers who had no intention of using transit could see the number of people and potential cars transit was removing from the roadways. Mr. Marsella stated proportionality could be judged by the ability to approach the issues with the right motivation (pure, good transit network overall) and a concern for valid numbers and assumptions.

(Mr. Johnson clarified his comments stating the Triangle Region’s concerns with proportional governance were that the needs of smaller communities would be ignored (small fish in a big pond). Mr. Johnson stated the Wake bus plan proposed bus service that would be “recycled” (discontinued and capital/funding used for other services) if they did not meet productivity goals.)

David Eatmon asked the panel if they felt a plan could be “sold” on just short term service improvements.

[The panelists agreed that a plan cannot be “sold” on the small details. The panelists stated that the area must have a strategic plan that shows how the area will invest.] Mr. Marsella stated the area must “sell” an honest vision of where it wants to go. Mr. Marsella stated the public understands rail projects promise speed and reliability benefits. Mr. Marsella stated the public doesn’t always understand why it does not make sense to

move immediately to higher service levels and different technology. Mr. Marsella stated the area needs to create an honest and incremental strategy for getting to these larger investments. Mr. Marsella stated the areas needs to preserve right-of-way to allow a bus to rail evolution. Mr. Marsella stated the area should focus on investments that have applications and build value today but have utility for future plans.

Mr. Staley stated that a challenge of selling a transit vision is that you have to sell it to people who never or infrequently use the product. Mr. Staley stated that there is disconnect between travelers, who tend to be very pragmatic (reacting to convenience, reliability, speed), and voters, who tend to be driven by emotion or conviction. Mr. Staley stated it takes a shift in the way an area looks at the problem to address the disconnect between travelers and voters. Mr. Staley stated the area needs better ways of measuring the overall benefit of transit investment. Mr. Staley stated the area should look at overall property value increases (multiple corridors), direct subsidies to transit users (lower is better), and directly compare different technologies (rail / bus) as far as cost / benefit.

Mr. Polzin stated leaders themselves tend to preclude certain transit investment strategies by “selling” preferred projects based on the “image issues” of bus services. Mr. Polzin stated this bias toward certain investment types, rather than ridership and service metrics, limits creativity and downgrades other (bus) investments to “second tier status”. Mr. Polzin stated this area cannot afford this type of bias. Mr. Polzin stated today’s buses and bus service options are very good and must be strategically “sold” as premium products.

David King asked the panel how an “incremental” plan would relate to a plan update.

[The panelists agreed that “incremental” investments start immediately and the next “increment” of investment occurs when an established metric [ridership, service goal] is met. The panelists stated real world changes that impact ridership are central to an incremental plan.] Mr. Polzin stated that an “incremental” plan programs when investments should occur based on metrics. Mr. Polzin stated in Tampa, Florida they determined that when overall system ridership doubled it would be appropriate to look at major improvements on selected corridors. Mr. Polzin stated the Tampa system today is making service changes and investment to boost ridership and is seeing year after year increases. Mr. Marsella stated a clear understanding of which amenities drive ridership is essential in transit investment. Mr. Marsella stated convenience, reliability and cost are very important. Mr. Marsella stated the plan should focus on investments that address these amenities.

(Mr. King clarified his question noting that local technology investments (mobile phone applications) have decreased the wait time anxiety for many users. Mr. King stated that all of the local plans would be updated every four years. Mr. King stated the region’s transit was known and it was understood that it might take years to get there.)

Ray Boylston asked the panel to assess the importance of rail projects to future economic competitiveness.

[The panelists agreed that although many other factors are much more important, good transit is a “needs to be present” issue for future economic development. The panelists stated it is better to craft a “good transit” message around a good overall transit system rather than a single great project.] Mr. Polzin stated a lot of the headlines on the “Millennial” generation are over-simplified and over focused a particular “very mobile” subset (20%) of this generation. Mr. Polzin stated that while individuals in this very mobile 20% generally do include a “good” transit system on their lists of how to choose where to live it is typically below other factors such as affordability, opportunities for employment and cultural amenity. Mr. Polzin stated the other 80% of the “Millennial” generation has tremendous needs for access and employment. Mr. Polzin stated that as many as 1 in 3 of these individuals did not graduate high school. Mr. Polzin stated the varied characteristics of the “Millennial” generation make it very important for an area to understand its market when making transit investment.

Mr. Marsella stated that a good transit network is constantly evaluating whether it is providing the right services and the right products. Mr. Marsella stated people need a good way to get from point A to point B. Mr. Marsella stated the area should focus on providing “good” transit services and good things will happen.

(Mr. Boylston clarified his question noting that the “Millennial” generation has shown a preference for transit and urban lifestyles. Mr. Boylston noted that many researchers feel transit will be crucial to competing against other areas nationally and internationally in the future.)

Panelist Summary Statements

Mr. Polzin reiterated that transit issues are tough complex issues. Mr. Polzin stated that it was important to be honest and objective about transit investment because they are very expensive. Mr. Polzin cautioned that the area should never impact people who need transit for the sake of a “grand ribbon cutting”. Mr. Polzin stated that “turf” issues and ego need to be checked and the area needs to work toward consensus. Mr. Polzin stated some of the harshest critics of transit are very well versed on the issue. Mr. Polzin stated transit is a much more government intensive investment than roadways and it requires high levels of scrutiny on governance and management. Mr. Polzin stated that finalizing governance in this area may take a while but it will be worth the effort.

Mr. Staley stated the Raleigh-Durham is a great area with a great quality of life. Mr. Staley stated that transit does have a future in this market. Mr. Staley stated the question is what is the best way to do transit here? Mr. Staley reiterated that transportation only has value in that it provides access and / or mobility that people actually want and are willing to pay for. Mr. Staley stated the area should not lose sight of this economic relationship in its rush to “accomplish something”. Mr. Staley stated bad investments and bad decisions are very possible and these decisions would have long term repercussions.

Mr. Marsella stated he felt very optimistic about transit in Wake County. Mr. Marsella stated the Board of Commissioners and the Mayors have a “predisposition to making progress”. Mr. Marsella stated that obviously transit is expensive and is not likely to get cheaper but this should not be used as an excuse not to get it “right”. Mr. Marsella stated the area should create the best short range and long rang plan you can and create tests to see if it is working. Mr. Marsella stated there was room for transit expansion in the area but the area needed to be careful where it expanded and what types of services it offered. Mr. Marsella stated the area should focus on urban routes with high ridership. Mr. Marsella stated the area should work on a demand response system that can work in rural areas. Mr. Marsella stated the area should listen to how the skeptics of the plan perceive the plan and use this feedback to make the plan better. Mr. Marsella stated in Denver a lot of people who never plan to use transit voted for the plan because there was a logical approach to “get other people off the road”. Mr. Marsella stated it was very important to craft a plan that most people could buy into.

Mr. Maloney thanked the panel for their time and presentations.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 P.M.

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