

CHARLOTTE AREA TRANSIT SYSTEM

PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE
BLUE LINE EXTENSION DRAFT EIS

METROPOLITAN TRANSIT COMMISSION MEETING

Wednesday, September 22, 2010

At Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center

600 East Fourth Street, Room 267

Charlotte, North Carolina

Stenographer: CAROL S. LOEWEN, RPR
Notary Public

KAREN B. RAY
COURT REPORTING SERVICES
119 Hickory Hill Road
 Mooresville, North Carolina 28117
704-660-5961 - FAX 704-663-0520

1 (Meeting commences at 5:30 p.m.)

2 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: We're going to
3 call the meeting to order because the first order
4 of business is a public hearing and we like to try
5 to be on time since those notices are published in
6 the paper and the media so we like to try to follow
7 what we're supposed to do. And I need a motion to
8 open a public hearing.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER: So moved.

10 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Is there a second?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER: Second.

12 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: All in favor say
13 aye.

14 COUNCIL MEMBERS: Aye.

15 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Okay. I have a
16 list of speakers who want to speak this evening,
17 but before we do that just for one second John Muth
18 is going to show us a few slides just to kind of
19 give some background on what we're hearing about
20 tonight.

21 MR. MUTH: Thank you very much. Again,
22 this is the public hearing for the Blue Line
23 Extension Draft EIS. Again, these comments that we
24 get tonight along with the comments that we've been
25 receiving during the comment period will be

1 summarized and we'll bring those to you in the
2 October MTC meeting to assist with your taking
3 action on the NEPA preferred alternative. All the
4 responses will be documented in the final EIS and
5 that EIS will be completed sometime in the summer
6 of 2011. And, again, anyone who submits a comment
7 as we address that EIS they will receive that final
8 EIS, they'll know what the disposition is of the
9 comment.

10 Again, this is a formal public
11 hearing tonight. This is part of our required
12 45-day public comment period on the DEIS. The
13 comment period runs -- started August 27th with a
14 notice of the Federal Register and it runs through
15 October 12, 2010. And tonight is the only time
16 that verbal comments are going to be recorded.
17 And, again, this hearing is being recorded for the
18 formal record.

19 And the way we want to conduct the
20 hearing is the speakers will be called up by
21 Commissioner Roberts in the order that they were
22 signed in. Each speaker will have three minutes, a
23 maximum of three minutes. If you would, please
24 state your name for the record, and also if there's
25 any group that you represent, please mention that

1 as well. Speak clearly so the stenographer can
2 properly record your comments. And then, again, if
3 you have any additional comments that you need to
4 submit, we have comment sheets available. And,
5 again, the comment period is open until
6 October 12th.

7 With that I'll turn it over to you,
8 Commissioner Roberts, to introduce the speakers.

9 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: All right. Thank
10 you, John.

11 And the first person I have signed
12 up is Mary Hopper.

13 MS. HOPPER: Good evening.

14 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Good evening.

15 MS. HOPPER: I'm Mary Hopper, executive
16 director of University City Partners. When I was
17 hired by UCP seven years ago, my duties included
18 studying how to get the stretch of North Tryon that
19 runs through our municipal service district transit
20 supportive. My board felt that their commitment to
21 the entire transit plan meant they needed to put
22 major effort in preparing for the Blue Line
23 Extension. Beginning with Ron Tober, all CAT CEOs
24 have emphasized the importance of that line in the
25 context of the role that it can play in the overall

1 transit vision simply because it completed the
2 first existing line. To that end, University City
3 Partners has funded out of its tax income two area
4 plans, an urban boulevard plan, an urban land
5 institute study and had Todd Noell look at our
6 transit station development potential. We have
7 always been committed to be active partners in
8 MTC's larger transit vision for the entire system.

9 I am here tonight on behalf of our
10 board to say we're excited that this important
11 milestone of the DEIS has been achieved. We have
12 studied the DEIS document and are comfortable with
13 its findings in large measure because of the very
14 issues that it raises. When I spoke to you some
15 months ago, I asked that the DEIS take into
16 consideration the unique and in some cases
17 challenging characteristics presented by the
18 hospital, the delicate labs they have as well as
19 the ones at the Charlotte Research Institute,
20 UNC-Charlotte's rolling topography, the need to be
21 able to access the major entrance to University
22 Place as well as being able to cross Harris
23 Boulevard. We are delighted that CATS listened.
24 It gives us confidence we can all continue to work
25 together, that CATS listens and they care.

1 When I was asked last month to write
2 an editorial for Business Today, I emphasized that
3 University City will benefit from the construction
4 both of the Red and which I'll keep insisting on
5 calling the Blue Line. While that is our -- while
6 that is the belief of our board and of the property
7 owners in our tax district, I'm here tonight to
8 tell you University City stands ready to help
9 achieve the overarching vision by getting our leg
10 of the larger plan ready for light rail. Thank
11 you.

12 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Thank you,
13 Ms. Hopper.

14 The next speaker signed up is Peter
15 Franz. Welcome.

16 MR. FRANZ: Thank you. My name's Peter
17 Franz. I'm with UNC-Charlotte. I'm the director
18 of real estate and land use there. Again, thank
19 you for allowing us to speak on behalf of the
20 University.

21 I've been working personally on the
22 light rail since it was originally proposed on
23 campus many years ago now and were behind the
24 scenes and up front. It's been quite an experience
25 for the campus, so I just really wanted to let you

1 know that we've reviewed the DEIS pretty carefully,
2 the chancellor has read it as well, and we did not
3 find any objections to anything that was in there.

4 Part of our experience working with
5 CATS, just so we can kind of give a history, is
6 when the rail first was proposed to come on campus,
7 it was going to come into an area at the Charlotte
8 Research Institute off Tryon Street. And working
9 with the group of CATS we were able to shift this
10 entrance to allow the campus up there to be able to
11 build out the Charlotte Research Institute Campus
12 where prior we would have been restricted and
13 probably would have lost two or three buildings
14 with the space. But now with the cooperation of
15 the CATS folks we've been able to plan for building
16 out the 300,000 square feet that we may have lost.

17 We have also had concern in the
18 beginning about vibrations with our buildings and
19 the CATS folks have set up testing which will begin
20 soon to assure our professors and researchers that
21 they will not have to be concerned about the
22 vibration of the rail as it passes our campus.
23 Let's see what else we have here. There was also a
24 concern of the rail coming near on -- well, near a
25 residence hall. There's a station that would be on

1 our campus on the north edge which is pretty so
2 situated for many of students will be able to ride
3 it downtown. The concern there was that the rail
4 might be too loud, that the vibration would be bad.
5 But, again, we were assured by CATS, we took a tour
6 of the rail, found that the rail system was
7 extremely quiet which was a large concern of
8 students who tend to go to bed at three in the
9 morning and get up early, so good there.

10 Let's see what else I have. Then
11 the last thing I have really here is that, because
12 the rail is such an impact to our campus, we are
13 continually growing, we have projects that will
14 interface with it at times. So one of the largest
15 one was on our campus which is mostly in an area
16 that is undeveloped at this time, they carefully
17 edged it with our existing roads and proposed
18 roads. And they coordinated with us very good,
19 very closely, a parking deck that we'll have
20 there that we would be allowed an aggregate crossing
21 to access this land that at this time is
22 undeveloped. We don't plan to develop it until
23 another ten years or further. But, again, this was
24 a large concern that we would be able to access
25 this property in the future, and we were able to

1 work with them to --

2 (Interruption.)

3 MR. FRANZ: Is that my time?

4 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: That's your three
5 minutes.

6 MR. FRANZ: Oh, I didn't think I'd run
7 that long. Okay. Thank you. That's fine. Thank
8 you.

9 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Okay, thank you.
10 I was going to give you --

11 MR. FRANZ: I can finish.

12 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: You're fine.

13 The next speaker is Nancy Reitz.
14 Welcome.

15 MS. REITZ: Good evening. I'm Nancy
16 Reitz with Casto Properties. We own University
17 Place. And it was 25 years ago that Shops at the
18 University Place was opened as Carolina's first
19 mixed-use development offering retail, hospitality,
20 residences and offices as well as schools in the
21 works. The private owner I represent, Casto, found
22 this a vibrant and healthy mix compelling to pay
23 enough at 70.5 million dollars to purchase the
24 acquired property in 2005. Casto purchased the
25 property heavily because it was located in a

1 rapidly-growing area not to mention the nature of
2 the property. Being that it spans over 75 shops,
3 services and eateries amongst the lake setting
4 offering year-round entertainment and serves as a
5 fantastic destination for both convention attendees
6 and students alike, we have found strong alliances
7 with our neighbors at UNC-Charlotte and the
8 Charlotte Research Institute including the
9 hospital.

10 Key members of our management team
11 have been involved since our acquisition in helping
12 those prospects including on serving on committees,
13 UCT to influence funding and community support,
14 meeting with key city officials to ensure the
15 proposed group and meet the community expectations,
16 most importantly those of UNC because of its
17 ridership. That said, we have been at the table
18 throughout University City area plan and its work
19 to bring land uses into compliance with transit
20 needs.

21 We appreciate CATS' willingness to
22 work with us. We are relieved that J M Keynes will
23 remain open as a key entrance to our town center.
24 We are here for the long haul and remain committed
25 to help bring light rail to University City. Thank

1 you.

2 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Thank you,
3 Ms. Reitz.

4 Our next speaker signed up is Bill
5 Leonard. Welcome.

6 MR. LEONARD: Good evening. My name is
7 Bill Leonard and I am the president of Carolinas
8 Medical Center at University Hospital. Over 25
9 years ago our community leaders were concerned
10 about the magnitude of growth to the center and
11 south center of our city. The board of Carolinas
12 Medical Center took a bold step in locating
13 CMC-University Hospital in the yet as undeveloped
14 University City where our neighbors were
15 UNC-Charlotte and three cow fields. This vision
16 has been a huge success and we are proud to have
17 been part of the growth of a healthy and vibrant
18 University City.

19 We have an opportunity to sustain
20 the growth that has evolved by supporting the
21 advancement of CATS' light rail system. We support
22 the continued development of the rail system for
23 the following reasons because, number one, it can
24 benefit our hospital by allowing workers and
25 patients -- visiting patients and visiting our

1 medical park the opportunity to come via light rail
2 and reducing vehicular transportation and the
3 chance to contribute to the sustainability of our
4 community.

5 We also have worked with University
6 City developers and the Departmental -- Department
7 of Transportation to plan the original road
8 improvements, the installation of the traffic
9 signal to support the entrance to our hospital, and
10 we are pleased that CATS has recognized the
11 importance of that signal on J M Keynes and will
12 continue that as light rail comes to our community.

13 We're very pleased to stay involved
14 in the work as we continue to bring light rail to
15 the thousands of people that access our campus
16 every day and work very closely with the engineers
17 on the vibration and sound impact on our very
18 active and vibrant hospital campus. Thank you.

19 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Thank you,
20 Mr. Leonard.

21 The next speaker is Michael Morgan.
22 Welcome.

23 MR. MORGAN: Okay. Last night I just got
24 back from Florida after spending a couple of weeks
25 there, and I had the chance to experience some

1 other transit systems and I was amazed at how
2 different the systems are, you know, that I was
3 able to -- to view. One thing in particular is in
4 Miami they have the exact situation as here in
5 Charlotte. They have Tri-Rail which is their
6 commuter rail. They have the, you know, Metro Rail
7 which is like their light rail. And then they have
8 their buses. The flow between counties was
9 unbelievable, okay? And I talked with a number of
10 people and they said that the -- to get to the
11 other counties and bringing people in was one of
12 the biggest benefits that -- you know, that they
13 had.

14 Now, what I did is, you know, I used
15 it and I looked at it and one of the things that
16 you all have said before is that the light rail
17 on -- down south, our Blue Line, has created over
18 \$2 million in investment, okay? Right now you
19 keep, you know, saying that you want to build the
20 whole rail system at one time, but what you're
21 doing is stopping the stimulus ability of getting
22 even a portion of the light rail built and the
23 investment that would be made from individuals, you
24 know, by having the light rail built. Say, you
25 know, you could -- you could go strictly to NoDa,

1 you know, which is 36th Street and just build that
2 portion and the investment would pour in from
3 people wanting to be able to, you know, have, you
4 know, the structure, you know, the way that we did
5 on South Boulevard.

6 So, you know, every -- what I'm
7 saying is that every inch of the light rail should
8 be built as soon as possible. It's never going to
9 be any cheaper, you know. The costs have more than
10 doubled, you know, and it's probably going to be
11 tripled or quadrupled by the time you get around to
12 building it. If you build it now, you'll have the
13 whole infrastructure and the ability to stimulate
14 the economy by all the jobs that, not only would
15 the light rail, you know, create, but you'd have
16 all the investment that's coming in from the new
17 portion of the light rail.

18 So we're just asking that you don't
19 wait to build the whole thing at one time, that you
20 build it however far you can go as the monies are
21 available the same way you've done with the street
22 car project, okay? So hopefully, you know, we can
23 get things progressing faster and get the economy
24 stimulated so that we can do more. Thanks.

25 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Thank you,

1 Mr. Morgan.

2 And the last speaker is Charles
3 Strickland.

4 MR. STRICKLAND: Thank you. I'm an
5 advocate for a better transit here in Charlotte and
6 a transit user being visually impaired, legally
7 blind, unable to drive, CATS is my car. And I'd
8 just like to echo a little bit of what Mr. Morgan
9 has said in that we need to get as much of the
10 light rail built as soon as possible because, as he
11 mentions, economics-wise prices go up. They don't
12 go down as the years go by.

13 The current system has been in
14 effect, the 9.6 miles, for three years and
15 basically nothing else has been looked at or done
16 in a work sense. Everything's been on paper
17 through here. Mayor Tarte I believe had mentioned
18 at the last meeting that, you know, we've got this
19 half-cent sales tax coming in, but people are not
20 really seeing anything from it other than the 9.6
21 that have been built. They keep talking of more
22 rail being built, the Red Line, Silver Line, Blue
23 Line Extension, but they're not seeing any results
24 from it. And I think as Michael had mentioned, if
25 we could build it in stages, that that should be an

1 option. Because as it's being built, people see
2 it, people will realize that, hey, this is going to
3 work. It's going to stretch out and it will get
4 there.

5 But, also, one thing that goes along
6 with the light rail are bus connections off of it
7 to get the people that need to get to and from
8 their jobs, to and from work in a easily,
9 transitional manner that doesn't take two,
10 two-and-a-half hours one-way trips like it does
11 currently. Even if you're using the light rail,
12 all these bus connections are not fluid that allow
13 people to use it the way it needs to be used. And
14 that's -- I just want to say that, if this
15 Commission can help steer things in a way to where
16 it can be used, that would be wonderful. Thank you
17 very much.

18 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: Thank you,
19 Mr. Strickland.

20 And I believe those are all the
21 speakers who are signed up to speak. So I now need
22 a motion to close the public hearing.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER: So moved.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER: Second.

25 COMMISSIONER ROBERTS: All in favor say

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

aye.

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Aye.

(Public hearing concludes at 5:50 p.m.)

1 CERTIFICATE OF STENOGRAPHER

2 STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA) SS.:

3 COUNTY OF IREDELL)

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

I, Carol S. Loewen, Registered Professional Reporter, Notary Public, the officer before whom the foregoing portion of the Metropolitan Transit Commission meeting was taken, do hereby certify that the persons whose comments appear in the foregoing transcript were taken by me to the best of my ability and thereafter reduced to typewriting under my direction.

This the 27th day of September 2010.

CAROL S. LOEWEN, RPR
NOTARY PUBLIC #200735100079