

# **Public Meeting Summary**

## **LYNX Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) – March 3, 2008**

### **Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church**

#### **1. Purpose and Intent**

The purpose of the public meeting was to provide an update about the Preliminary Engineering phase for the LYNX Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) and to begin the community dialogue about opportunities for public input in the coming months. The LYNX Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) will hereafter be referred to as the BLE in the remainder of this document. The program ended with a question and answer session.

The BLE public meeting at the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church was attended by local business owners and nearby land developers, as well as residents living along the corridors.

Questions from the public generally had to do with the project schedule and funding qualifications.

#### **2. Meeting Date, Time, and Location**

The meeting was held on March 3, 2008 within the BLE study area in the Sugaw Creek Presbyterian Church fellowship hall, from 6:00pm to 8:00pm.

#### **3. Public Notices**

##### **3.1. Mailings**

In advance of the meetings, a total of 12,711 postcards were mailed to addresses within ½ mile of the light rail alignment and in the corridor database on February 18, 2008.

Project newsletters highlighting the public meetings, CATS new CEO, and FTA's approval to enter PE were mailed February 25, 2008 to 874 addresses listed in the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) BLE rapid transit planning database.

##### **3.2 Newspaper Announcements**

Newspaper advertisements invited the public to participate in a discussion about the BLE light rail project. The advertisements were published in two local newspapers and appeared on the following dates:

- *The Charlotte Observer* Mecklenburg Neighbors Central and University City Neighbors sections, Sunday, February 24, 2008
- *La Noticia*, Wednesday, February 27, 2008

### **3.3 Other Communications**

In addition to postcard invitations, newsletter mailings and newspaper advertisements, the Charlotte Area Transit System employed the following meeting notification methods:

- CATS' press releases promoting the public meetings were sent to Charlotte area media outlets on February 28, 2008.
- E-mail meeting notifications were sent to 795 e-mail addresses listed in the CATS rapid transit planning database for the BLE on February 22, 2008.
- The public meetings were listed on the CATS' Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) web site ([www.ridetransit.org](http://www.ridetransit.org)).
- The public meetings were listed in three separate places on the official City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County web site ([www.charmeck.org](http://www.charmeck.org)): (1) The web site's front page on the "Charmeck" news list – with a link to a press release (2) The City of Charlotte events calendar and (3) The public meeting and press releases links from the Charlotte Area Transit System main page.
- Informational flyers (a.k.a. "Rider's Alerts") about the public meetings were placed on 10 CATS bus routes serving the BLE on February 28, 2008. An electronic notification was sent to individuals signed up to receive information about those routes.
- Bulletins for the public meetings aired regularly on the City of Charlotte's Government Channel 16.

### **3.4 Handouts and Displays**

BLE public information materials were available to each meeting attendee. These materials included the following documents:

- Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) Transitions Newsletter - Winter 2008 Edition
- Blue Line Extension (Northeast Corridor) Fast Facts
- "Notify Me" instruction cards to stay informed
- PowerPoint presentation
- Art-in-Transit cards listing the LYNX Blue Line (South Corridor) art projects

The following poster-size display was set up prior to the meeting and was available for viewing throughout and following the meeting:

- A map of the corridor showing the alignment options.

## **4. Meeting Procedure**

### **4.1 Presentation**

The BLE public meeting was organized to include a PowerPoint presentation followed by a question and answer session. Community Relations Manager Jennifer Green opened the meeting and introduced the evening's agenda. She explained that the meeting's purpose was to update the public on the current project status and explain the next steps in the Preliminary Engineering phase. She introduced Keith Parker, CATS' CEO, who

gave preliminary comments on the success of the LYNX Blue Line (South Corridor) and the future of CATS' other rapid transit projects. Ms. Green then introduced Danny Rogers, the Senior Project Manager for the LYNX BLE. He gave a presentation which provided information on the proposed light rail project, the potential benefits and impacts of the alignment choices and station locations, projected ridership and costs, land use context, and uptown and terminus alignments.

Kathy Cornett, a land use manager with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department, reviewed the team's station area planning activities – the opportunities presented and the challenges faced. In addition, she reviewed the type of stations and infrastructure improvements under consideration along the corridor.

A detailed record of the public feedback received is included in Section 5: Summary of Public Input.

## **4.2 Attendance**

Several members of the project team were on-site to deliver presentations, discuss the project with meeting attendees, and record questions and comments. City of Charlotte staff included representatives from the Charlotte Area Transit System, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission, and the Charlotte Department of Transportation. A project consultant from STV/Ralph Whitehead also attended.

Eighty-five (85) people attended the meeting, plus 16 project team members, and one member from the consultant team. Reporters from *The Charlotte Observer* and WSOC TV were in attendance.

# **5. Summary of Public Input**

## **5.1 Question & Answer/Comments Section**

Listed below are questions and comments raised by the public at the meeting. Questions and public comments are in **bold**. Summarized answers by Senior Project Manager Danny Rogers and other project representatives follow in plain type.

1. **Will the line be extended into Concord?**
  - Cabarrus County has inquired about an evaluation to determine if it is feasible to extend the proposed line into Cabarrus County. It would need to be determined if light rail is the appropriate technology or if commuter rail would be more appropriate with the long distance of the line.
2. **What is going to be done about graffiti on art work?**
  - CATS will try to use materials that are graffiti resistant and easy to clean.
3. **How are we going to cross the railroad tracks at Sugar Creek?**
  - While it is still too early in the preliminary engineering study to be sure, the road will most likely go under the railroad.
4. **What is the plan for 36<sup>th</sup> Street?**
  - CATS will build a new track paralleling the existing railroad track.
5. **What percentage of the rail line will be elevated?**

- The preference is to have stations that are not elevated for easier access. However, there are some that will need to be elevated such as the University City station and possibility the I-485/North Tryon station.
6. **What about the difficulty getting to North Tryon?**
    - CATS will be looking at different options during preliminary engineering to determine the best way to get onto North Tryon.
  7. **Is there any coordination with Amtrak?**
    - Eventually, Amtrak will be in Uptown near the Gateway Station. CATS will be coordinating with Amtrak, NCDOT, Trailways, and the NCR.
  8. **Is there any conflict with the proposed baseball stadium?**
    - No.
  9. **Will the buses integrate with the light rail?**
    - CATS will coordinate the bus and rail system for easy transfers. Our goal is to design a system to provide a seamless transfer.
  10. **How many future corridors are planned?**
    - The Purple Line is the proposed commuter rail for the North Corridor.
    - The Silver Line is the proposed bus rapid transit line for the Southeast Corridor.
    - Enhanced bus is proposed for the West Corridor for the short term with a future proposed streetcar.
    - Streetcar is proposed from the Rosa Parks Community Center (Beatties Ford Road) through Uptown to the Eastland Community Transit Center (Central Avenue).
  11. **Will the stations be accessible?**
    - All stations are designed to meet ADA requirements.
  12. **What is the proposed time schedule for the rail line to NoDa?**
    - CATS plans to build the entire alignment at one time. A detailed analysis of the schedule is currently being done, but it will probably be around 2015.
  13. **What will be the impact to Tryon Street?**
    - North Tryon Street is state owned; CATS will coordinate with NCDOT. Studies during PE will determine how North Tryon will be designed, including the number of turn lanes needed, pedestrian signals, and safety features.
  14. **How will people who live on dead end streets get in and out during construction?**
    - This project isn't just about transit, it's about improving accessibility. CATS will be working with other city departments, evaluating each situation, to determine road connections and other improvements needed throughout the corridor. Coordination with CDOT will ensure access to neighborhoods. Public input will be included in the analysis too.
  15. **Will the existing railroad continue to be utilized?**
    - There are no plans to reduce the freight line activity.
  16. **Why can't Charlotte take a more aggressive plan and build all the corridors/the full system simultaneously?**
    - It took Houston from the mid 70's to about 3 years ago to build their first rail line. It took Charlotte only 9 years. However, there are fiscal constraints to building it all at once. The ½ cent sales tax does not produce enough revenue for CATS to build the whole system at once.

After the success of their first line, Houston and Denver implemented additional funding sources to build additional lines faster.

17. **With all the excitement of the first rail line, what about additional funding?**
  - CATS is not going to advocate for additional funding. Citizens can advocate for and seek additional funding options.
18. **Would it save money to build station by station or to phase the project?**
  - It would be more costly to phase the project. Costs would increase for engineering services and the FTA process and would reduce the overall effectiveness of the design phases.
19. **With a plan out to 2030, how are we sure the plan will meet our needs?**
  - CATS re-evaluates the plan every 3 to 4 years and continues to look at the needs of Charlotte. We will look at the priorities and options, continue to update the plan, review financial capacity, and evaluate changes in revenue sources to provide the best transit system for the region.
20. **How often did we use the process of eminent domain on the South Corridor?**
  - Some, but not often. Approximately 80% of the properties were acquired through negotiation and 20% through condemnation.
21. **How would you get to Mount Mourne from here?**
  - You will have to travel to Uptown and transfer to the commuter rail. The Gold Rush service will take you from the light rail station to the commuter rail station Uptown.
22. **When will the alignment and stations be decided?**
  - Some discussions will be as early as this summer, like the Sugar Creek alignment option. We will be holding public meetings to get citizens input on the Sugar Creek alignment in June or July. We should have some more defined information by the end of the year.
23. **Do we have examples of how other city's citizens established additional funding to build their light rail lines quicker?**
  - Three cities have solicited for extra funds: Denver, Houston, and Dallas. You can contact their Chamber of Commerce for additional information.
24. **How many people are riding without a ticket?**
  - Less than ½ of 1% are getting on without a ticket. Ridership and revenue are increasing at the same level. Ridership on the Blue Line is 30% higher than projected, averaging 12,000 riders per day when the projection was 9,100 by the end of the first year of service.
25. **How much affordable housing will be around the stations? Will quality of life be maintained?**
  - We don't determine price points for private development. We want to see more intense uses to benefit station areas, such as offices and residential. Developers have several options to qualify for tax credits, such as 80% meeting the average income.
26. **Is there an emphasis on trying to maintain communities and affordability?**
  - Residential prices tend to be higher, but developers want tax credits, which is an incentive for affordable housing. The City can not dictate to developers.
27. **What is the City doing about the property at 36<sup>th</sup> Street?**
  - There is an RFP process. They are currently early in the scope, using low tax credits and historic tax credits to develop. There is a requirement that a certain percentage be available to median income.

- 28. Why isn't the airport a priority?**
- The airport is close to Uptown, without a lot of congestion. Overhead wires of the light rail conflict in some areas with airlines height requirements. CATS is implementing an enhanced bus service to the airport to provide quicker more frequent service to the airport.
- 29. What security is in place now? What is planned for the future?**
- CATS has 12 transit police, security cameras monitored 24/7, additional lighting at park and ride lots, 34 company police, and 4 fare inspectors. There is digital surveillance system on the trains and at stations that will be continued on the next line.
- 30. How can we get bus service to new neighborhoods in the University area (on Back Creek Church Road)?**
- CATS used to have Route 249 serving that area and it didn't perform well.
- 31. What is the City's reason for not using design build?**
- We have not ruled it out yet. We are looking at other systems to see what they did and what worked best.
- 32. Will we segment the construction packages for the project?**
- We don't know yet how we will package it for bidding and construction.
- 33. Can CATS be on Norfolk Southern's right of way?**
- Most of the ROW belongs to NCR and Norfolk Southern has a lease agreement with them. CATS will need to coordinate primarily with NCR and have already started some discussions.
- 34. What is the alternative if we can not be in the railroad ROW?**
- Right now it looks feasible to use the ROW so there are currently no other alternatives.
- 35. Is the freight yard moving to the airport (west side)?**
- We are assuming the intermodal freight yard is staying.
- 36. Wouldn't it be detrimental to the environment to have a station on campus at UNC Charlotte?**
- Because of the environmental impacts we need to look at the campus closely to determine the best way to access the campus. CATS will be looking for solutions to mitigate environmental impacts.
- 37. Aren't there problems with elevations and walls separating neighborhoods?**
- The preference is to have at-grade stations to avoid large structures in the air. The goal is to add to the community.
- 38. What methods are in place to be sure the Powers that Be don't alter the plan?**
- We can't predict or control what future City Councils and small towns will do. Just 4 months ago, the northern towns were on board with the North Corridor, then after the recent election we are not sure. However, the FTA has never backed out once the FFGA has been signed.
- 39. How long until we get the to the full funding grant agreement?**
- We are still a few years away. The FTA approved moving forward into PE. FTA also hires consultants as a resource to provide guidance, offer adjustments, and to keep the project on track. FTA invested in CATS once and saw great success and hopefully will again. CATS' Blue Line success story made the cover of the FTA quarterly report.
- 40. Is one of the issues on building the whole line because CATS may lose funding?**

- The project is more cost effective as a whole, therefore, more likely to qualify for funding as a whole. As a whole, a better system will be built, offering greater mobilization and a better benefit to the community.
41. **Will it take longer if we go beyond I-485 into Cabarrus County?**
- We have a project that goes from Center City to I-485 at North Tryon. To go beyond that would be an additional project. To include Cabarrus County as part of this project, we would have to re-study everything and that wouldn't be cost effective. We will work with Cabarrus County to see if it's possible to extend the line.
42. **Will construction start at Center City and work out? Will the line open as areas are completed?**
- We will be working on the whole corridor at one time, similar to the South Corridor construction. Due to traffic control issues around the railroads, it is possible that we could open the inner portion of the line shortly before the entire line.
43. **Only one bus on Mallard Creek Church Road, how will this connect to the rail line?**
- CATS will be evaluating how different areas connect with the line, shuttles, transfers, or other connections.