

[submitted by Robert Healy on 10-13-2015, [REDACTED] via
info@ourtransitfuture.com]

Comments of the New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee on the DRAFT Environmental Impact Statement for the Durham-Orange LRT

The New Hope Creek Corridor Advisory Committee was created in 1995 to advise Durham County, the City of Durham, Orange County and the Town of Chapel Hill on the implementation of the 1994 New Hope Creek Corridor Plan. We offer the following comments on the DEIS:

- The Committee expresses relief that the crossing of New Hope Creek recommended in the DEIS does not follow the LPA and that a crossing of the creek parallel to the 15-501 bridge is recommended. The LPA route would have been extremely damaging to what is one of the most important natural areas in the entire New Hope system, the New Hope Bottomlands. This area contains large trees, extensive wetlands and stream meanders, and an important nature and recreational trail. An LRT crossing in this area would create enormous damage during construction. The pylons supporting the tracks would be a noticeable visual intrusion. Noise, vibration and light from trains would disturb wildlife using the corridor and people using the nature trail. These and other impacts have been clearly underlined in letters submitted to GoTriangle by the City of Durham (3/13/15 and 8/26/15) and the County of Durham (5/28/15), which form part of the public record.
- The Committee is disappointed that alternative route NHC-2 was recommended, rather than NHC-1. NHC-2 crosses undeveloped (and largely unbuildable) wetlands, between South Square and Garrett Rd., that are associated with Sandy Creek, a tributary of the New Hope. These wetlands and their associated drainages are biologically part of the New Hope Bottomlands complex. Disturbance of these lands, including their fragmentation, would have a significant adverse impact on New Hope

resources. Even if the track were elevated, it would result in land disturbance and tree removal during construction. There would be new light, vibration and noise impacts, especially at night. By contrast, alternative NHC-1 largely follows existing roadways. Along 15-501 it would impact current businesses. However, addition of a station at Garrett Rd. would result both in increased ridership and the potential for station-area redevelopment, with very little damage to the environment. Much of the land within a half mile radius of the Garrett Rd.-15-501 intersection is economically underutilized or even vacant (e.g. the long empty site of the former Darryl's restaurant) and could be converted to more dense, more profitable, uses with minimal environmental damage.

- The Committee notes that NCDOT is requiring a 38 foot setback on both sides from the existing 15-501 roadway for addition of an extra pair of highway lanes next to the LRT in the transit corridor. This seems to the Committee to be bad public policy. It would utilize public funds to build infrastructure that would compete with the LRT and weaken its ridership base. Additionally it will cause the filling of more New Hope corridor wetlands. It will also lengthen the wildlife passage under 15-501. The wider the area occupied by the combination of the highway and the LRT, the lesser the functionality of the wildlife corridor.
- Impacts on Trenton Rd./Leigh Farm Park. Leigh Farm Park is one of the gems of the New Hope Corridor, offering both historical and natural values, and currently providing environmental education for hundreds of students. The New Hope Corridor plan stops at I-40 in its Southwest quadrant. Thus the proposed location of the ROMF does not directly impact the planning area. However there are potentially serious indirect impacts. Three unnamed streams cross under I-40 from the ROMF site and drain the ROMF area into Leigh Farm Park and ultimately into the New Hope. Runoff from the ROMF would include the pollutants associated with paved surfaces, as well as chemical associated with maintaining, repairing and washing rail cars. We understand that there is already flooding of Trenton Road after heavy rains. Runoff from the ROMF would exacerbate this problem. There

are also potential noise and light impacts that could affect both wildlife and recreational use of Leigh Farm Park, as well as the trail intended to connect Leigh Farm Park northward to the rest of the New Hope system.

- The NHCCAC is pleased to see that the Patterson Place location is no longer under consideration as a location for the ROMF. Patterson Place would have been environmentally and structurally unsuitable due to steep slopes. It is also extremely valuable land that can be the site of a dense, compact neighborhood and a major generator of walking traffic for the LRT.
- Mitigation. To the extent that construction of the project results in negative impacts on wetlands, wildlife corridors or other natural resources, federal, state or local funds should be made available for suitable mitigation. Any mitigation measures should be similar in kind and in place and in particular located within the New Hope Corridor.

Adopted by the NHCCAC at its meeting of October 8, 2015.