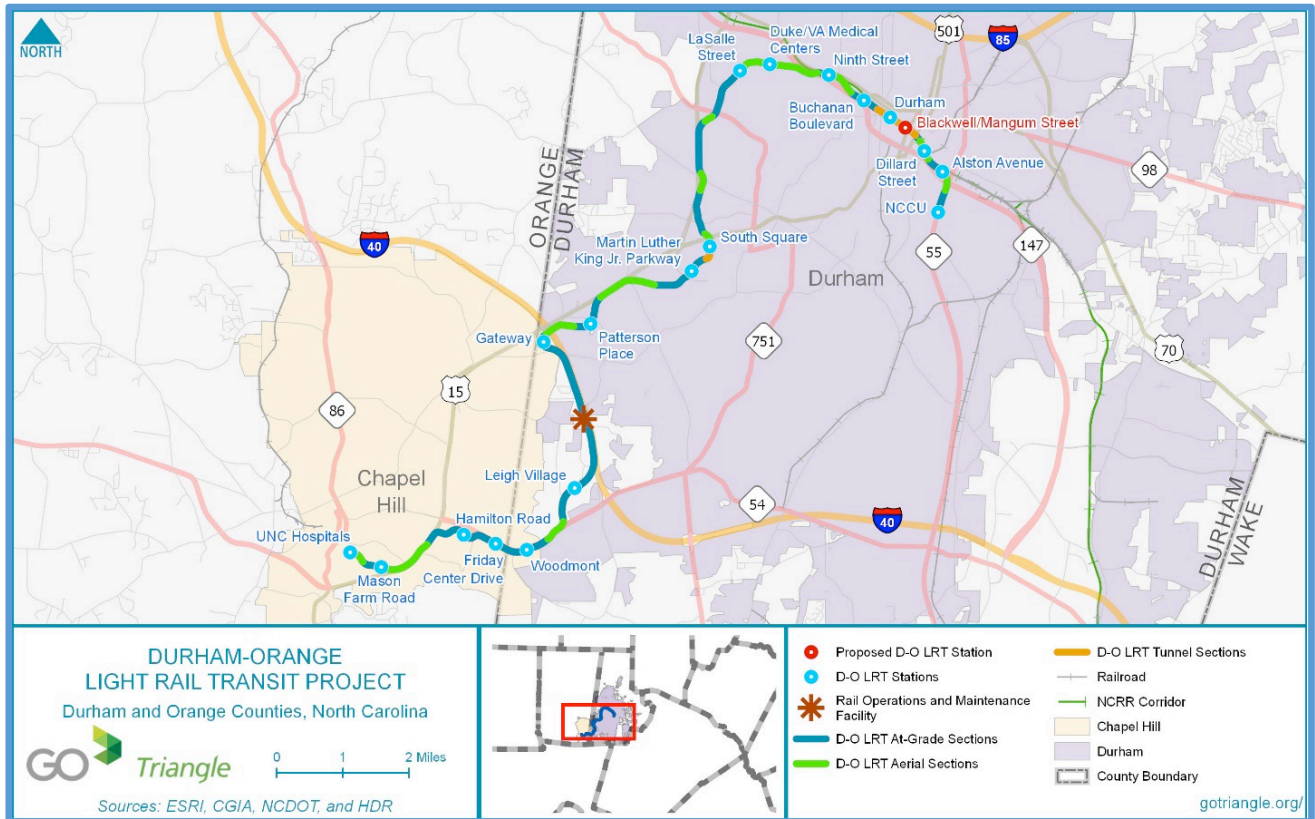


# FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM ON

## DURHAM-ORANGE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT PROJECT GOTRIANGLE



October 2019

### Executive summary

On March 27, 2019, the GoTriangle Board of Trustees voted to discontinue the pending Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project due to challenges in securing agreements from key stakeholders within deadlines imposed by the North Carolina General Assembly. The decision resulted in the termination of nearly a decade of planning and engineering to implement light rail connecting Chapel Hill and Durham as part of a larger regional effort to provide public transportation options across the growing Triangle area. The board's action follows the 2007 decision of then-Triangle Transit Authority to cancel a previous highly developed regional rail project connecting Raleigh and Durham.

In light of the light-rail project cancellation, Jeff Mann, then-president and CEO of GoTriangle, with the concurrence of the Board of Trustees, requested the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) to undertake a review by public transportation peers of lessons that can be gleaned from the cancellation of the DOLRT project with respect to stakeholder consensus, the role of management and the board in project advancement, and steps to be taken prior to pursuing future projects.

The peer review team interviewed some 20 current and former staff, board members, community leaders and stakeholders on September 18 and 19, 2019, and presented its initial observations and recommendations on September 20 and reviewed project documents and conducted background research. These observations and recommendations, based solely on the two days of discussion, are detailed in this report and address project selection, communications, project management, organizational leadership and the role of the GoTriangle board. It is likely that many of the actions recommended by the peer review team may in fact have been undertaken by GoTriangle during the course of this complex project, and the peer review team does not in any way intend that its recommendations imply a lack of diligence or competence by GoTriangle staff or its Board.

The DOLRT Project was a highly complex and ambitious project to be implemented wholly by GoTriangle. It would have been GoTriangle's first multi-billion-dollar project, requiring compliance with challenging FTA requirements and construction on a very large scale. Hence, its implementation represented a huge step for the agency and for the community.

The team identified four broad findings and recommendations deserving special focus:

- **Concerns about GoTriangle's ability to deliver large scale rail projects:** Interviews with staff, community leaders and key stakeholders reveal concerns with GoTriangle's ability to deliver large scale rail projects, in large part based on the failure to deliver the 2007 regional rail project and the DOLRT project. Difficulties and challenges with the projects have eroded public confidence in GoTriangle. It is critical that confidence in the agency be rebuilt prior to or as part of the process to implement the next project. To begin rebuilding and in anticipation of the CEO search, it will be important for the board to reach agreement on priorities for the authority. These priorities will inform the CEO search process. In addition, the team recommends using the CEO recruitment process as an important and major first step in engaging the public and key stakeholders in a discussion about the future of the agency, its role in the region and its plans for the future.

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

- **Project selection:** The process for selection of the next project or projects will be critical to GoTriangle’s ability to implement its plans for the future. Given the fate of the last two major projects, GoTriangle, and its regional partners, should consider a reset, or at a minimum a revalidation, to ensure that: the next project represents the agency’s highest priority; it has been fully evaluated with regard to purpose and need; and it can in fact be successfully implemented. This should include a prioritization of future major projects, a comprehensive benefit-cost analysis for each, and realistic assessments and qualification of all significant risks (e.g., likelihood of state funding and support from major stakeholders). Importantly as well, this process should assess the impact of new projects on the ability of the agency to successfully perform its core mission: bus and other transportation services across the region.
- **Stakeholder relationships:** As the DOLRT project has demonstrated, major stakeholders—whether the General Assembly, the Railroads (NCR and Norfolk Southern) or the largest regional employer (Duke University) —can effectively stall or kill major projects. Development of a highly detailed and choreographed strategy for building and maintaining support and consensus from key stakeholders and the public is fundamental and paramount. This can be particularly challenging when dealing with private stakeholders, such as Duke University, which may lack governance structures and officials that can be held publicly accountable for past promises and commitments. Agencies should be very cautious before undertaking costly work in advance of specific and enforceable commitments from key stakeholders, or at a minimum, without conscious and defined assessments regarding the state of stakeholder consensus. Here, GoTriangle believed that the Railroads and Duke University were in fact fully committed to advancing the DOLRT and resolving key engineering issues, based on the signed documents and continued negotiations. In the peer review team’s experience, however, and as demonstrated here, advancing work on the basis of broad promises and commitments in the hope of future specificity and enforceable agreements is risky and substantially enhances the negotiating position of the stakeholder.

For future projects, the communications, stakeholder relations and governmental affairs functions should be organized under and be the responsibility of a single senior manager. There should be specific owners for each key stakeholder relationship, coordinated and frequently assessed by this senior manager, and include detailed requirements and timelines for stakeholder agreements. In addition, there should be metrics for tracking stakeholder support, risks and pivotal decision points in the timeline.

- **Board composition and leadership:** Board oversight typically is critical for successful project delivery. The board serves as a two-way conduit for building and communicating public and stakeholder support for the project. It also should be a source of broad subject-matter expertise on which the CEO and project team can rely to supplement their expertise and experience. Most importantly, a board should bring a healthy skepticism and dispassion that enables it to ask the hard questions and, where warranted, to hit the stop button. This requires:
  - A formal discussion by the board and CEO as to respective roles in planning and delivering a project—who does what and how; how issues and information are communicated between

## **FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM**

the board and CEO; and a set of decision checkpoints requiring full discussion of the risks and merits of moving forward; and

- A board composed of members that reflect the views, experience and diversity of the communities they represent.

The peer review team thanks GoTriangle and the many interviewees for their candor and sincerity, their desire to be constructive, and their passion for the project and for public transportation. GoTriangle can and will have a bright future. Importantly, the public, communities and institutions are depending on the agency to take the lead in transforming the Triangle into an integrated, connected region. We hope the recommendations presented contribute positively to that success.

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

### Peer review team

At the request of Jeff Mann, then–president and CEO of GoTriangle, and with the concurrence of the GoTriangle Board of Trustees, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) assembled a peer review team to assist the organization in reviewing lessons learned from the discontinuance of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project.

A panel of industry peers was assembled, based on each member’s experience in planning, managing, implementing and/or communicating major capital programs.



**EMIL H. FRANKEL**  
Senior fellow  
Eno Center for Transportation  
Washington, D.C.



**JEFFREY A. PARKER**  
General manager/CEO  
Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA)  
Atlanta



**BARBARA RICHARDSON**  
Executive vice president, External Relations  
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)  
Washington, D.C.



**DAVID J. CAROL**  
Chief operating officer  
American Public Transportation Association (APTA)  
Washington, D.C.



**JEFF HIOTT**  
APTA peer review facilitator  
Vice president, Technical Services and Innovation  
American Public Transportation Association (APTA)  
Washington, D.C.

### Peer review panel biographies

#### **Emil H. Frankel**

Emil Frankel is an independent consultant on transportation policy and public management issues, a senior fellow at the Eno Center for Transportation, and a senior advisor of Crosswater Realty Advisors. From 2007 to 2011, as director of transportation policy of the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), he led the preparation of BPC's report "Performance Driven: A New Vision for U.S. Transportation Policy," and from 2012 to 2014 he was a visiting scholar and senior advisor at BPC. Frankel was assistant secretary for transportation policy at the U.S. Department of Transportation from 2002 to 2005. He received his bachelor's from Wesleyan University and his LL.B. from Harvard Law School and was a Fulbright Scholar at Manchester University in the United Kingdom.

#### **Jeffrey A. Parker**

Jeffrey Parker has more than 30 years of experience in both the private and public sectors of the industry, heading operations and expansion programs in several multimodal transit agencies. Parker was named general manager/CEO of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) in March 2018, joining the organization after serving as the vice president of the Georgia/Alabama/Tennessee District of HNTB Corporation, one of the country's leading architecture and engineering consulting firms. Parker was appointed as the commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Transportation in 2010 by then-Governor Jodi Rell after serving as deputy commissioner for two years.

#### **Barbara Richardson**

Barbara Richardson is the executive vice president of external relations for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). Richardson's experience spans more than 25 years, with much of it in public affairs, board management, branding, marketing, communications and strategic planning. A member of WMATA's Executive Management Team, Richardson leads the agency's external relations strategies with key stakeholders, including public officials, government agencies, business organizations, civic groups, customers and the media.

#### **David J. Carol**

David Carol is the chief operating officer for the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). Carol is responsible for supporting the activities of the CEO, streamlining and integrating internal APTA operations, and leading APTA's advocacy and support for the industry's rail services and initiatives. Prior to joining APTA in 2018, he spent nine years with WSP, serving as its market leader for passenger, freight and high-speed rail. He led various major passenger and high-speed rail projects across the U.S. and most recently helped manage design and construction of new light-rail transit projects in both Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Carol also worked for the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), leading commuter rail, streetcar and multimodal station programs. He spent 19 years with Amtrak, where he served as assistant general counsel, senior director of Congressional & State Affairs, and vice president of high-speed rail.

#### **Jeff Hiott**

Jeff Hiott is vice president of the Technical Services and Innovation Department for APTA and its peer review facilitator. He holds a B.S. in civil engineering with a transportation focus from Georgia Tech. Prior to APTA, Hiott spent several years working at an engineering firm and at the Georgia DOT.

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

### Interviews and field visits

The peer review team convened in Durham September 17-20, 2020. Over the course of two days, the panel toured the DOLRT project corridor and interviewed the following staff, Board members and stakeholders:

Steve Schewel	Mayor of Durham, GoTriangle Board
Wendy Jacobs	Chair, Durham Board of County Commissioners, GoTriangle Board
Ellen Reckhow	Durham County Commissioner, GoTriangle Board
Mark Marcoplos	Orange County Commissioner, GoTriangle Board
Michael Parker	Chapel Hill Town Councilor, GoTriangle Board
Sig Hutchinson	Wake County Commissioner, GoTriangle Board
Will Allen	GoTriangle Board
Tallman Trask	Executive Vice President, Duke University
Tom Bonfield	City Manager, City of Durham
Michael Goodmon	Former Chair, GoTransit Partners Board of Directors
Jeff Mann	Former CEO, GoTriangle
David King	Former CEO, GoTriangle
Patrick McDonough	Manager of Planning and Transit Oriented Development, GoTriangle
Sandra Freeman	Chief Financial Officer, Go Triangle
Katharine Eggleston	Chief Development Officer, Go Triangle
John Tallmadge	Former Interim DOLRT Rail Project Director, GoTriangle
Danny Rogers	Former DOLRT Project Director, GoTriangle
Tom Henry	Interim General Counsel, GoTriangle
Tammy Bouchelle	Former Associate General Counsel, GoTriangle
Bob Baughman	HNTB, Project Management Consultant Team

# Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit Project

## 1. Methodology

APTA has conducted peer reviews for member organizations for many years on a broad range of issues, including technical, operations, safety, organizational efficiency and program management. Peer review teams are comprised of highly experienced transit professionals able to share methods, insight and experiences interactively with the requesting property based on their experience at their own agencies.

Peer reviews are narrowly focused, and the results, while detailed, usually are at a high level. The process typically involves a review of relevant documents and personal interviews of key stakeholders, staff and interested parties. Following completion of the interviews, the team caucuses to summarize key observations and recommendations. A presentation is then made to the requesting property and followed by a written report. The requesting property is free to accept and take action on the recommendations if and to the extent it deems appropriate.

## 2. Scope of this report

In its request letter, GoTriangle indicated an interest in several areas, which served as a guide to the peer review team:

- Overall management/oversight of the DOLRT project and how issues/information/concerns were communicated to key stakeholders
- Engagement of stakeholders and the building of stakeholder consensus regarding key project elements/attributes
- Assessment of the efficiency of cost-sharing and financial decisions as they impacted stakeholders
- Interactions and communication with the Federal Transit Administration during the New Starts Engineering phase and leading up to the decision to discontinue the project

The interviews and work of the peer review team focused on the top three issues; the team and interviewees were not able to assess issues related to the FTA.

The request letter is included in this report as Appendix A.

## 3. Opening comments

The peer review team was impressed by the candor and sincerity of all interviewees. There was little effort to place blame; all wanted to learn from the experience to enhance the success of future efforts. There is a strong and passionate commitment of all staff and the board to GoTriangle, its core mission and to public transportation solutions. There also was fundamental support for the DOLRT project and great disappointment over its termination. The peer review team, each member of which has been involved in large capital projects, was also struck by the complexity of the DOLRT project, particularly for an agency undertaking a job of this size for the first time. It is easy to grow numb to large numbers, but a \$2.4 billion LRT project presents enormous management, coordination and leadership challenges.



## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

The team also noted two important underlying issues:

- There is belief in the goal of regionalism, but the term is not consistently defined, and there are concerns about how best to achieve a regional transportation system given the lack of regional governance structures and the polarity of political views. This is a fundamental issue for the region's leaders to address.
- The termination by GoTriangle of two rail projects has resulted in concerns from both staff and community leaders about the agency's ability to advance multi-billion-dollar projects. Many felt that the agency was not adequately organized or staffed to undertake a \$2.4 billion project. Nonetheless, there remains the belief that the region must be connected by public transportation and that GoTriangle can ultimately deliver successfully if appropriately funded, organized and staffed.

Despite disappointment in the termination of the project, interviewees emphasized many important positives that will position GoTriangle for future success. These include:

- Successful core bus operations on which the region is dependent
- Substantial sales tax revenue for future projects
- GoTriangle's de facto role as the governance structure undergirding regionalism in the Triangle

## 4. Observations and recommendations

### 4.1 Project selection

#### Observations:

The interviews underscored an underlying concern that, despite passage of tax referenda in Durham and Orange counties, the LRT project may not have been the best first project for the region. Many transit agencies start smaller—Charlotte's initial Blue Line LRT cost less than \$450 million—and the DOLRT project required resolving thorny issues with both the Railroads and Duke University.

Transportation is experiencing rapid change, with new technologies, new services, and changing travel preferences and demographics. New options exist today that might change the approach for connecting the region. For example, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is experiencing rapid growth and success across the country as a cheaper and more quickly implemented option than LRT (BRT was an alternative developed during the alternatives analysis, but the land use benefits from LRT were deemed more significant.) These changes should be taken into consideration when assessing future alternatives to meet the region's travel needs.

Project selection should address several key questions, including the following:

- Does the project adequately support regional needs, priorities and aspirations, and is it truly regional, meeting the goals of the multiple jurisdictions?
- Is this the most cost-effective approach for achieving the region's transportation and other goals?
- Has there been adequate analysis of funding, stakeholder and implementation risks and benefits?
- Can the project survive changes in state support?
- Do stakeholders, including the public, fully see, understand and embrace the benefits?

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

- Does the organization have the capacity to execute the project?

### Recommendations:

1. The peer review team felt strongly that GoTriangle and its partners responsible for regional transportation planning should, prior to jumping into the next project, engage in an exercise to revalidate the goals and approaches for achieving regional connectivity, reflecting on changes in funding, technologies, travel preferences and land use objectives. Today's answers may be different from those generated just five years ago.
2. Moving forward, it is critical to ensure that project implementation does not interfere with or undermine the agency's ability to successfully perform its core functions. It is also important to reconfirm and communicate those core functions to the agency's constituents and to provide the staff and financial resources to ensure their success. For every project, but particularly a multibillion-dollar megaproject, there must be a rigorous, quantitative, thorough and transparent analysis of costs, risks, benefits and challenges to implementation of the project. This goes well beyond maintenance of a risk register and regular updates to the board. It requires staff and the board to fully comprehend what it will take to implement the project, the risks to doing so, and the implications of both success and failure on the mission of the agency. Moreover, project risks must constantly be updated in light of changing circumstances. Realism regarding challenges is a critical prerequisite to success.

In addition, there must be transparency regarding risks, challenges and implications to the general public. In this case, did the board, key stakeholders and the public fully understand the level of commitment from and the implications of the failure to secure the support of key stakeholders such as Duke and the Railroads? Did Durham and Orange counties fully understand the financial implications of agreeing to commit their sales tax revenues for decades to come?

3. Credibility in the agency's ability to implement the project is essential. GoTriangle should engage the board, staff, experts and the community to define what is needed to enhance credibility. Most often the foundation from which to enhance an agency's reputation lies first in successfully delivering on the core mission, and GoTriangle should determine if the community believes that this is the case. Major project implementation is more than the simple sum of the parts; it requires a belief in the institutions undertaking the work, trust that leadership is fully engaged and fighting the necessary battles, and an intrinsic commitment to success by the entire community.

## 4.2 Capital project management

### Observations:

Discussion with several stakeholders, particularly business stakeholders, revealed skepticism that the DOLRT project could ever be successfully implemented. This skepticism enabled stakeholders on whom project success depended to defer, delay and disengage from efforts to resolve key issues.

For others, hope and optimism tended to trump frustration and concern. Many were willing to move forward on the assumption that the organization could successfully deliver the project, even as they questioned whether it really would. This lack of confidence was based on several factors:

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

- The different roles and responsibilities of staff and consultants were not clearly defined, at least in practice. Ownership of key issues was at times either unclear or divided among different people or entities.
- The responsibilities of the CEO and project director at times overlapped or lacked clarity, impacting communications and leadership on specific issues and resulting in items that fell through the cracks.
- The multitude of consultants, and at times their overlapping mandates—in practice if not by contract—raised concerns that all were not pulling in the same direction.
- Project team members felt left in the dark as to the activities and engagement of senior leadership and board members.

The largest complaint revolved around the constant rework required in the effort to address concerns raised by Duke and the Railroads. With the decision to advance all engineering across the project in parallel, the many design changes in Durham forced changes elsewhere as well, with weeks of hard work tossed out for the latest change. There was a sense of futility by staff, and lots of raised eyebrows by those observing from the outside. The constant rework undermined confidence that the light-rail project team was using its staff efficiently or that the project actually was advancing.

### **Recommendations:**

1. The peer review team recommends ensuring that the project delivery model and staff capabilities match the project needs. This seems obvious in retrospect, but it is not always easy to grasp in advance the challenges a project poses or the meshing of key staff personalities. Three points, however, are critical:
  - The project director must be a forceful leader viewed by staff as supporting their needs and by the community as confident, capable and with the backing of senior management and the board. He or she must be viewed as in control.
  - The board, CEO and project director must understand their respective roles and work to complement one another. This requires efforts to very specifically define those roles, strong communications about progress or lack thereof, and intervention when roles or personalities fall out of alignment.
  - Consultants must be closely managed. While major consulting firms offer highly valued expertise and experience, they do not necessarily understand local issues or culture and must proactively be made to understand and commit to the strategies and management styles of the agency leadership. The project director must be highly experienced in managing consultants and insist that the consultants provide their best possible staff for the specific issues at hand.
2. The peer review team recommends developing a strategy for resolving fundamental issues and obstacles in a timely manner. This could include holding multiday workshops to discuss specific issues—using, where appropriate, outside facilitators and other experts. Peer reviews and expert advisory boards can provide best practices and alternative approaches.
3. The termination of the DOLRT project underscores the risk of “kicking the can down the road” when dealing with fundamental issues on which project implementation depends. The team is cognizant of the difficult time constraints imposed on the project by the General Assembly. Nonetheless, project managers and the agency must determine which issues are so critical that one should not advance

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

beyond “Go” before resolving. In this case, despite initial general agreement with Duke University and the Railroads on key engineering issues, the effort to mitigate myriad and changing concerns by the key stakeholders led to constant reworking, significant expense and underlying questions as to the commitment of the stakeholders to successful project implementation. In some cases, where the risks associated with a failure to secure agreements will fundamentally undermine project success, agencies should not advance other costly project elements until agreement has in fact been secured.

### 4.3 Communications and stakeholder management

#### Observations:

The risks associated with buy-in from and agreement with both Duke University, other key stakeholders and the Railroads were well-known and understood from the beginning of the project. Nonetheless, the failure to secure agreements with these critical stakeholders ultimately doomed the project.

The peer review team did not interview any staff from the GoTriangle communications team. Based on interviews with other staff and consultants, the peer review team concluded that there should have been a more comprehensive, integrated and strategic stakeholder and communications program. For example:

- There were overlapping stakeholder and communications responsibilities and ownership, areas with no owners, and at times conflicting messages.
- While there was a proactive communications effort, there was a lack of successful coordination between the project team and the broader communications team, resulting in different and incomplete understandings of the project’s benefits by the public and key stakeholders. A number of stakeholders remained unsure why the region would spend so much money and risk so much disruption to connect Durham and Chapel Hill (as opposed to, for example, Durham and Raleigh or Chapel Hill and Raleigh).
- There was a lack of project champions, particularly in the employer/business community. Champions can make the case with a conviction that can appear more genuine than that of an agency or elected official.
- There was no apparent agreed-upon strategy for key stakeholders, such as Duke and the Railroads, and no clear owner of the relationship with each major stakeholder. One person should have been responsible for managing and achieving success with Duke, the Railroads, UNC-Chapel Hill and other key stakeholders. While others must necessarily play in the orchestra and help shape those relationships, there should be only one conductor.

Successful project delivery is often more about the stakeholders than it is about technical solutions. An engineering solution can almost always be developed; for some political and stakeholder challenges, solutions may be scarce or not worth the effort.

#### Recommendations:

1. For future projects, the peer review team recommends that GoTriangle focus as much on achieving stakeholder objectives and agreements as designing the actual project:

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

- There should be an integrated organizational structure for stakeholder and communications management reporting to a single senior agency manager or chief communications officer (“Chief”) encompassing government, stakeholder, media and community relationships.
  - The agency should identify designated senior management owners for each key stakeholder relationship, for this purpose reporting to the Chief, with frequent assessments of and updated strategies for the relationships. The relationship owners may in fact be the CEO or other senior agency officials (and could even include a member of the board), but the responsibility for coordinating and assessing the relationships should reside in a single person.
  - Formalized engagement of key stakeholders —e.g., through participation on advisory boards or review panels—can generate (and at times force) important benefits.
2. The stakeholder strategy should be integrated into an overall communications strategy for the agency, built upon the priorities of the board and senior management. It would evolve over time but always with the purpose of maintaining and building support with multiple constituencies, ranging from the agency’s own employees and customers to the general public, as well as major employers and funders.
  3. It is recommended that the agency assess its organizational structure to ensure that the fundamentals of managing relationships and engaging with the multitude of external interested parties is coordinated, strategic, timely and informed.
  4. Business leader support and champions can provide immense support for a project, articulating project benefits, offering cover on challenging issues and engaging project opponents. Finding strong voices of support is often pointed to as one of the most essential prerequisites for project success.

### 4.4 Role of the board

#### Observations:

GoTriangle benefits from a strong and active Board of Trustees. The team found the level of interest in the project and the passion for the welfare of the community by individual board members very powerful.

The peer review team found, however, that the role of the board with regard to the project may not have been adequately defined. Board members at various times served as cheerleaders, active participants, stakeholder managers, overseers and interested bystanders. Obviously, the board must play all these roles at different times, but which and how should be strategic, deliberate and transparent.

The peer review team also found that the board is not currently constituted to provide the CEO and agency with broad board-level subject matter expertise to supplement staff expertise and experience. A diverse board brings important data, points of view and experience to bear on the activities of the agency. CEOs and staff benefit from this expertise. In addition, with all due respect to the individual members and the great service they perform for their communities, building public support for projects and for an agency often requires that the board itself reflect the diversity of the community. This is especially applicable where project implementation adversely impacts specific communities.

## FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM

### Recommendations:

1. The panel recommends that, in advance of future projects, the board engage in a facilitated discussion to define its role in supporting the project. Key issues for the discussion might include the following:
  - What is the board's role in implementing the project? How can it best advocate on behalf of the undertaking while appropriately exercising its fiduciary responsibilities? How active should its members be in meeting with and talking to the public and key stakeholders?
  - How will the board, agency and region define success?
  - What are the communication protocols and other restraints with respect to board member conversations, meetings and negotiations with stakeholders?
  - What types of information does the board want and need, and from whom?
2. At major junctures and decision points during the life cycle of a project, the board should insist on taking the time to pause, understand, reconsider, play devil's advocate—and ultimately, if appropriate, reconfirm or change the decision to move forward.
3. The panel recommends, as appropriate and when possible, an effort to evolve toward an appointed board that reflects the diversity of the community. This can be critical in building support for the agency and for difficult decisions that must be made during major projects.
4. Given the timing of the search for a new CEO, the peer review team recommends that the board take the time to articulate its vision and goals for that person: What are its highest priorities for the CEO? What should she or he focus most on? What are the board's expectations and metrics for measuring CEO success? What type of agency does the board want the CEO to create? One approach is for the board to agree to five shared priorities for the agency in preparation for selecting a new CEO. This should include outreach to staff, the community and key stakeholders. As noted, this process can serve as a great tool for rebuilding confidence in the agency.

### 4.5 Organizational leadership

#### Observations:

Termination of the project, and the departure of some key staff including the CEO, has led other staff to question moving forward on the commuter rail between Raleigh and Durham. While staff continue to believe in the mission of the organization and the value of commuter rail, morale clearly has been undermined, particularly with recent staff turnover.

Staff indicated that the selection process for the next CEO will say a lot about the agency's near-term future and its ability to overcome the challenges of the past year. This sentiment was echoed by board members and stakeholders.

#### Recommendations:

1. The peer review team recommends using the CEO selection process to achieve several broad objectives:
  - Confirm or, if necessary, redefine GoTriangle's basic mission.

## **FINDINGS & RECCOMENDATIONS OF THE APTA PEER REVIEW TEAM**

- Achieve consensus within the board regarding the nature of its role and its expectations for the CEO.
  - Rebuild confidence in the agency with staff and the broader community. The board can reconfirm the agency's commitment to a culture of staff inclusiveness by seeking staff and community input on the CEO selection.
2. If GoTriangle pursues future major capital projects, the peer review team recommends consideration of a chief operating officer position to provide the time for the CEO to become the public face of the project. The team understands that GoTriangle in fact has recently created and hired a COO role.
  3. Given the importance of key stakeholders to the success of regionalism and specific projects, the team recommends that the board consider ways to institutionally engage major stakeholders within GoTriangle's governance. This could include nonvoting membership on the board for a business and/or academic stakeholder, or creation of advisory committees or boards on which stakeholders can participate in decisions that impact them.

### **5. Concluding remarks**

The peer review team thanks the GoTriangle staff and board for their outstanding cooperation. We applaud them for their passion for both public transportation and the mission of GoTriangle. There is a very constructive focus on learning from the past and moving ahead.

The panel is available to assist with any clarification or subsequent support that may be needed. APTA is always available to provide support and serve as a resource for GoTriangle's needs.

## Appendix A: Letter of request



*Connecting all points of the Triangle*

June 4, 2019

Mr. David Carol  
Chief Operating Officer  
American Public Transportation Association  
1300 I Street NW  
Suite 1200 East  
Washington, DC 20005

Re: GoTriangle Durham-Orange Light Rail Project Peer Review

Dear Dave:

Please consider this correspondence as GoTriangle's request for APTA to conduct a Peer Review of various elements of the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit (DOLRT) project. As we have discussed, we are requesting that the Peer Review focus on lessons learned from the decision not to pursue implementation of the project and we are hopeful that the findings and recommendations can be applied to future projects.

It is our understanding that the Peer Review will consist of on-site discussions with key project officials and stakeholders by a three-person Peer Review Panel jointly selected by APTA and GoTriangle. The discussion will take place over a one-week period, with additional input, discussions and follow up as needed via conference calls. We understand that given the multi-jurisdictional nature of GoTriangle's service area, the scope of the Peer Review will focus fundamentally on the processes associated with project oversight and decision making as they pertain to the building of stakeholder consensus. Key issues will be:

- Overall management/oversight of the DOLRT project and how issues/information/concerns were communicated to key stakeholders
- Engagement of stakeholders and the building of stakeholder consensus regarding key project elements/attributes
- Interactions and communication with the Federal Transit Administration during the New Starts Engineering phase and leading up to the decision to discontinue the project
- Assessment of the efficiency of cost-sharing and financial decisions as they impacted stakeholders

We would like to initiate the Peer Review during the week of 7/15, with the week of 7/29 as an alternate. Please let us know if this is too soon. We are flexible, but would like to conduct the review as soon as possible.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if additional information is required. We look forward to working with APTA on this important project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Mann".

Jeff Mann  
President and CEO

cc. Executive Committee



PO Box 13787  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709  
P: 919.485.7510 | F: 919.485.7547

[www.gotriangle.org](http://www.gotriangle.org)