

Questions and Answers about the GoTriangle Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility

November 1, 2018¹

If the site is rezoned for industrial use, what happens if the light-rail project doesn't get built?

In its rezoning application, GoTriangle has committed to use the site only as a Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility. This commitment becomes part of the site's zoning and remains enforceable even if ownership changes. If the light-rail project does not move forward, the site cannot be developed for any use unless the Durham City Council approves a subsequent rezoning.

How will the maintenance facility affect traffic?

GoTriangle was not required to prepare a Traffic Impact Analysis because the facility is not expected to generate much traffic. However, because neighbors expressed concerns, GoTriangle evaluated the actual traffic impacts to determine what roadway improvements might minimize them. The analysis concluded that there would be fewer than 300 daily trips to or from the facility. (Supplemental EA, [Appendix C5, page 4-2](#)). Because the facility would be open 24/7, staff members would arrive and leave at various times so the facility would not generate the heavy traffic at peak travel times that a typical office building would. The city's own analysis shows that if the site were developed using the existing residential zoning, nearly twice as many trips would be produced. (Durham City/County Planning Consolidated Staff Report, ROMF, [Attachment 8: Summary of Development Impacts](#))

To address the minimal effects of the project, GoTriangle has committed to making the following transportation improvements (Durham City/County Planning Consolidated Staff Report, ROMF, [Development Plan Sheet 3](#); Supplemental EA, [Appendix C5, page 8-2](#); Supplemental EA, [Appendix A2, Sheet 11](#)):

- Add a left turn lane on southbound Farrington Road leading into the facility.
- Provide two exit lanes from the site.
- Modify the existing traffic signal at Ephesus Church Road to accommodate the new access into the site.

¹ All GoTriangle environmental documents referenced here are available at <https://gotriangle.org/lightrail/resource-library>. The staff report for GoTriangle's October 9, 2018 hearing before the Durham Planning Commission is available at <https://durhamnc.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/2629?fileID=9889>. The electronic version of this document contains hyperlinks to each underlined reference.

GoTriangle also is proposing additional facilities to benefit neighbors walking and bicycling near the site. Those include:

- Widening Farrington Road to accommodate a 5-foot bicycle lane along the east side of the road.
- Providing pedestrian amenities at the Ephesus Church Road/Farrington Road intersection.

How will vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists access the site?

Access to the site will be provided via the main entrance along Farrington Road at Ephesus Church Road. On the Development Plan, there is a separate access onto the southern end of the site through the adjoining property that allows access to the existing wireless communication facility that will continue to be located on the site. (Durham City/County Planning Consolidated Staff Report, ROMF, [Development Plan Sheet 3](#); Supplemental EA, [Appendix A2, Sheet 11](#))

Why isn't this project providing a greenway along Farrington Road?

The city's [Trails and Greenways Master Plan \(2011\)](#) does not include a greenway along Farrington Road south of Ephesus Church Road. However, as part of its roadway commitments, GoTriangle will widen Farrington Road to provide a 5-foot bike lane on the east side (Durham City/County Planning Consolidated Staff Report, ROMF, [Development Plan Sheet 3](#); Supplemental EA, [Appendix A2, Sheet 11](#)). This widening will begin on the southern end of the site and continue along the site's frontage up around where the roadway narrows to meet the bridge that crosses I-40.

The Little Creek Connector trail that is planned to run along Farrington Road would come from the east across I-40 and continue south along Farrington Road to the intersection with Ephesus Church Road. At that point, the city's adopted plan calls for the trail to turn west along Ephesus Church Road. Several considerations suggest that the trail segment near the maintenance facility site would best be located on the west side of Farrington Road and not built as part of this project.

Why build a rail maintenance facility at a location where workers won't be able to use light rail to get there?

GoTriangle chose not to include a stop at the maintenance site for several reasons, including that a stop there would slow the train during a 55-mph stretch and increase travel time for all other passengers who would never exit at the facility. When the light-rail project nears completion, GoTriangle, GoDurham and Chapel Hill Transit will revamp bus service to eliminate routes that duplicate the light rail and then increase access to the light rail. Bus service to the maintenance facility will be examined as part of that effort. (Amended Record of Decision (ROD), [Table Amended ROD-1, Mitigation ID SDC02](#))

This is a very peaceful area and quiet at night, and I'm worried the facility will ruin that experience. What activities will take place overnight?

Based on GoTriangle's current plans and the procedures of other light-rail systems, operations at this facility are expected to be as follows:

- At the end of the peak afternoon service about 7:30 p.m., many light-rail vehicles will return to the site and be cleaned and repaired if needed inside the maintenance facility.
- When light-rail operations end about midnight, the remaining vehicles will return to the building for servicing then be returned to the outside storage tracks to prepare for the beginning of operations. They exit the site beginning about 4 a.m.
- If significant defects are found during servicing, the light-rail vehicles will be stored inside the facility to be inspected and repaired during daytime hours. If there are minor repairs that can be completed with minimal noise, those will be performed in the yard.

In addition, the facility will be subject to the city's noise ordinance, located in Chapter 26, Article II, of the City's Code of Ordinances.

Will any light from the facility reach residential communities?

Each exterior light fixture will include a shield on top that directs the light downward and not outward toward neighboring residential communities. GoTriangle has included this commitment in its Development Plan. (Durham City/County Planning Consolidated Staff Report, ROMF, [Development Plan Sheet 1](#); Amended ROD, [Table Amended ROD-1, Mitigation ID VAC01](#))

I don't remember hearing about this project. What have you done to inform the neighbors?

Public engagement has been an important part of the planning process for this project, and the current plan incorporates changes that have been made in response to public comments.

Durham and Orange counties have been developing this light-rail transit project in some form since the early 2000s. During a phase called Alternatives Analysis between 2010 and 2012, GoTriangle analyzed different technologies and routes for a high-capacity transit system connecting Chapel Hill and Durham. During that phase, GoTriangle conducted 19 public workshops attended by more than 1,100 people who provided more than 500 comments. The final Alternatives Analysis report, published in April 2012, recommended that four maintenance facility sites be evaluated. ([Alternatives Analysis](#))

To follow procedures required under the federal National Environmental Policy Act, GoTriangle also hosted four meetings in May 2012 and received more than 268 comments. That process led the Durham City Council to ask for the addition of a fifth potential maintenance site east of Alston Avenue. ([Scoping report and appendices](#))

Between 2012 and 2015, GoTriangle hosted more than 300 small group or neighborhood and stakeholder meetings as part of the environmental analysis process. The Federal Transit Administration published the environmental study Aug. 28, 2015, and GoTriangle hosted two public information sessions and two public hearings during a 45-day public comment period, leading to more than 1,300 public comments. (Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), [Appendix C1](#))

In addition to the general public outreach, GoTriangle held multiple meetings focused on the Farrington Road maintenance facility site. In June 2015, GoTriangle staff held a meeting at the Culp Arbor clubhouse so residents could discuss the facility. Letters were mailed to residents and property owners within a half-mile of the site, and 105 people attended. (Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), [Appendix C1, section 3.3.8](#))

In August 2015, more than 200 people attended a workshop about the maintenance facility at Creekside Elementary. To advertise this meeting, GoTriangle not only mailed letters to residents and property owners within a half-mile of the site but also contacted community and neighborhood association leaders; posted yard signs on Farrington Road, NC 54 and other major roads; and handed out flyers. (Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), [Appendix C1, section 3.3.8](#))

Before filing the Zoning Map Change and Future Land Use Map amendment applications and annexation petition, GoTriangle held two neighborhood meetings on Nov. 15 and 28, 2017. GoTriangle mailed letters to every property owner within 1,000 feet of the site and also sent two postcards to property owners and property owners in adjoining neighborhoods. Total combined attendance at these meetings was 135 people. (Supplemental EA, [Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1](#))

At the November meetings, GoTriangle learned that community members wanted to stay involved in the process. A workshop session was held at Creekside Elementary School in January 2018. The same people previously notified were sent postcard notifications, and people who had signed up at the November meetings also were notified. The main purpose was to provide updates on the project design and to garner input on the types of screening and fences along Farrington Road. (Supplemental EA, [Chapter 6, Section 6.3.1](#))

Why was this site selected?

The Farrington Road site was selected for the maintenance facility after a multi-year effort to identify potential sites. Between 2013 and 2015, GoTriangle analyzed five potential sites based on size, adjacency to the light-rail alignment and other roadways, land-use compatibility and the potential to avoid adverse environmental effects. In addition to the Farrington site, the other alternatives were:

- **Leigh Village:** About 21 acres between Farrington Road and the I-40 corridor.
- **Patterson Place:** Approximately 16 acres north of Southwest Durham Drive and south of US 15-501 near the Patterson Place shopping center.

- **Cornwallis Road:** About 20 acres east of Western Bypass and south of Cornwallis Road.
- **Alston Avenue:** About 19 acres adjacent to the North Carolina Railroad tracks, east of Alston Avenue between Bacon and Scoggins streets.

These five alternatives were studied during the two-year preparation of the environmental study, which found that:

- The **Leigh Village** alternative would permanently use the Walter Curtis Hudson Farm, a place eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Because there were other viable alternatives, this site was not recommended.
- The **Patterson Place** alternative was viable only with the light-rail project's original alignment, which proposed a transportation right of way through the sensitive New Hope Creek Bottomlands. This alignment would have had higher impacts to public parklands and water resources than the selected alignment, which crosses New Hope Creek adjacent to the existing US 15-501 bridge. The selection of this alignment made the Patterson Place alternative infeasible. (Currently, a new auto dealership is under construction along a portion of this site.)
- The **Cornwallis Road** alternative had several disadvantages, including operational issues due to the shape and size of the site and its relationship to the main light-rail track and a higher capital cost. It would have significantly affected existing roadways and required relocation of a state road. In addition, it more significantly affected community resources. (Currently, a self-storage facility is on the southern end of this site, and a senior living facility is under construction on its northern end.)
- The **Alston Avenue** alternative had a higher capital cost and operational difficulties because its location is at the end of the alignment. The site also added significant risk to the project because of the likely presence of hazardous materials and would have required displacing active businesses, caused a net loss of jobs and required the replacement of an existing railroad spur into a chemical plant.

With the support of stakeholders, including the Durham City Council and Durham Board of County Commissioners, the Record of Decision for the light-rail project issued in February 2016 included the Farrington site for the Rail Operations and Maintenance Facility, confirmed by FTA as the least environmentally impactful location.

A summary of the evaluation of ROMF sites can be found in the DEIS, [Chapter 8: Evaluation of Alternatives, Section 8.2.2.1](#). For further details, please see DEIS [Chapter 2: Alternatives Considered](#); [Chapter 3: Transportation](#); and [Chapter 4: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences](#). Letters of support from the Durham City Council and Durham Board of County Commissioners are included in FEIS, [Appendix G3: Municipal Agencies' Comments](#).

How did you take the community's concerns into account when designing the site?

Primary concerns included traffic impacts, noise impacts, safety and security and aesthetics, so GoTriangle has made the following commitments in its Development Plan:

- Set major facility elements back from the road. There is at least a 90-foot buffer between the western edge of the property along Farrington Road and the maintenance building, and in that 90-foot buffer there will be no rail vehicles or rail tracks. Within the 50-foot buffer between the edge of the property and the facility parking, GoTriangle will provide a minimum 20-foot buffer designed to block at least 40 percent of the view through the trees. In addition, GoTriangle intends to amend the Development Plan to be presented to City Council to include an additional strand of evergreens behind the vegetative buffer that are at least 8 feet tall when planted.
- Install landscaping consistent with the City Landscape Manual everywhere within the buffer where it is safe to do so. In addition, the maintenance building, retaining walls and earth berms will lie between I-40 and the existing residences across Farrington Road and will help block any noise. The Development Plan before the Planning Commission did not include a berm, but GoTriangle will include one in a revised submission to Durham City/County Planning.
- Build a security fence around the site and a gate at the main entrance. To facilitate traffic flow, GoTriangle plans to leave the gate open during shift changes when most employees are accessing the site.
- Include certain architectural elements and plans to create an attractive, functional building largely hidden from its neighbors. (Amended ROD, Amended ROD, [Table Amended ROD-1, Mitigation ID VAC02](#))
- Design the site without a vehicle body repair or a vehicle paint shop. Both of those functions will be performed off-site. (FEIS/ROD Section 1.4, [Table FEIS-2, DEIS Errata 21](#); FEIS/ROD, [Appendix E.1: Common Comment Responses](#))

Why do you need the rezoning before the funding for the project has been confirmed?

The light-rail project is in the Engineering phase of the federal New Starts transit project program, and GoTriangle is working with the Federal Transit Administration to receive a Full Funding Grant Agreement to pay 50 percent of the project's cost. GoTriangle anticipates making a formal application for the grant agreement in April 2019 and to secure the full agreement in September 2019. In GoTriangle's work with FTA, acquiring city approval for the rezoning of the maintenance facility site has been identified as a critical task to be accomplished before GoTriangle applies for the grant agreement.

How will the light-rail crossing of Farrington Road affect car traffic?

As part of the environmental study, GoTriangle analyzed potential traffic along the entire alignment, including along Farrington Road. The report found that the light-rail system would not have a significant effect on traffic in the area (Supplemental EA appendix C2).

There are already problems with flooding in the area during rain storms. Will construction of the maintenance facility make it worse?

The City of Durham regulates stormwater discharge and imposes stormwater performance standards on all development. The facility will be designed to meet or do better than those requirements. (DEIS, [Chapter 4: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences, Section 4.8.4](#); Amended ROD, [Table Amended ROD-1, Mitigation ID WR01](#))

This property is not eligible for the city's water and sewer connections and might affect options for my water or sewer access.

Along with its Zoning Map Change application and its application for a Future Land Use Map amendment, GoTriangle has filed a petition for annexation that will come before City Council, making the property eligible for city water and sewer connections. In addition, like any other developer, GoTriangle has coordinated with the City Department of Water Management and Public Works and will reroute water and sewer lines that cross the site to ensure that neighbors maintain utility access.

Is it true that this project is narrowing Farrington Road and will make it impossible to perform any needed widening?

The existing width of the Farrington Road right of way is about 60 feet. As part of its Development Plan, GoTriangle has committed to providing additional right of way as needed on the east side of the street to achieve a consistent width of 35 feet from the center line of Farrington Road to the western boundary of the property. This is consistent with a final 70-foot overall right of way for Farrington Road. That width is sufficient to accommodate one lane of traffic in each direction, a center turn lane, bicycle lanes and sidewalks.

In April 2018, regional transportation planning staff recommended reducing the future configuration of Farrington Road from a four-lane divided roadway to a two-lane divided roadway with bicycle facilities and sidewalks. Staff recommended this change because the area's future roadway plan includes an extension of Southwest Durham Drive across I-40 and continuing south to connect to existing George King Road, NC 54 and the area around the Leigh Village light-rail station. This Southwest Durham Drive extension and Farrington Road will be parallel and will be connected by local roads and collector roads identified in local plans. The combined capacity of these two roads will be adequate to accommodate future demand. In addition, not expanding the number of travel lanes on Farrington Road will provide a safer environment for people on bicycles and on foot.

The limitation of future right of way expansion on Farrington Road also enables the maintenance facility to be set back farther from the road and facilitates approval of a site plan that maximizes the site buffer.