

January 11, 2019

Wendy Jacobs
Chair, Durham County Commissioners

Penny Rich
Chair, Orange County Commissioners

Dear Commissioners Rich and Jacobs:

I have been following the Durham Orange Light Rail (DOLRT) issue for a number of years, going back to my tenure on the Chapel Town Council. I am sure you will agree that this project is at a critical stage.

The press has covered some of the unresolved issues, including the challenges near DPAC and Duke Hospital, none of which have been resolved. Any changes in design will escalate costs still further from the current 3.4 billion dollar price tag, with borrowed debt tying up our transit tax revenue until 2062. Additional costs will also have a significant impact on the ability of local governments to support and improve other necessary transit infrastructure, including our bus network.

Thus a meeting between GoTriangle officials and elected officials occurring at a critical time, where participants might discuss how taxpayer funds will be used, proposed trade-offs and cuts, and what additional taxes might be needed is expected to raise intense interest among those who will be paying for DOLRT.

When I learned that this meeting would be held at 8:00 am, Thursday, January 10th, of course we wanted to attend, but we were discouraged by GoTriangle Board of Trustees Secretary Michael Parker who said that the meeting organizers did not consider the meeting open to the public.

I appealed in a letter to Ms. Rich, on January 8th, to include the public in this important meeting. Ms. Rich responded to my request by saying that there was no meeting of importance that she knew of occurring on this date; she did, however, acknowledge a "gathering" over coffee that would occur in Durham with Orange and Durham County Commissioner representatives, and GoTriangle staff.

When my husband and I arrived at GoTriangle offices at the beautifully renovated offices on the 10th floor of the NC Mutual Insurance Building, we were told by GoTriangle Interim Operations Director Mr. Tallmadge and Durham Mayor Schewel in the outside offices that the public was not welcome to attend the

meeting since the meeting was not subject to the open meetings law. A local reporter was also turned away.

The attendance at the meeting included elected representatives from your respective Boards, GoTriangle officials, and staff from Orange and Durham County. Obviously, this was not an informal talk over coffee, but an important meeting on an important subject complete with a powerpoint presentation!

Open meetings on this topic at this time are not a luxury, but a necessity. A meeting that is not open to the public denies the public critical time-sensitive information about this controversial project. Citizens have the right to hear and understand discussion on matters which will affect them, especially since anything the group of elected representatives decided on will not likely be altered by your respective elected boards. Thus, we have in essence, critical public policy made behind closed doors.

This is not the first time that questions have been raised about closed meetings and lack of transparency at GoTriangle. Questions have also been raised in recent letters from prominent downtown Durham business leaders about the route and the financial impacts of this project that have become known at the eleventh hour.

GoTriangle is a public regional entity created by local governments and the Legislature, therefore it must be held to the goal of transparency and integrity. It is the job of our elected officials to hold GoTriangle to the community standards which you yourselves have supported.

We are very interested to learn what transpired at this meeting and assume the minutes will be conveyed to each of your respective boards so the public is aware of any new information that was shared.

Thank you.

Julie McClintock

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