

SEHSR TIER II RECOMMENDATIONS

09.07.2010

Mayor and Fellow Councilors:

Over our country's 230 year history City's who were located on rivers during the early 17th Century, on freight and passenger railway lines during the late-19th Century and City's with major International Airports and located on, or adjacent the US Interstate Highway system in the Mid-20th Century have prospered and grown. It will be those City's who have hubs along the Eastern Seaboard High Speed Rail Corridor that will continue to prosper and grow into the top tier cities of the 21st Century.

However, like the Interstate Highways System created in the 1950's, sealed high-speed rail corridors and the prosperity it brings, also comes with unintended consequences. They both severe city's existing road networks, as well as divide and sometimes even destroying established and historic neighborhoods. Today, we have a unique opportunity to capitalize on lessons learned from the past to insure they are not repeated today.

Much of the discussion thus far has focused on the Tier II alternatives NC1&2, NC 3 and citizen proposed alternatives NC4 and NC1&2 hybrid. All of these proposed alternatives will impact one, to two of our historic downtown neighborhoods. Furthermore, the NC1&2 alignment would cause the closure of key downtown roadways, Harrington and West Streets. Both NC1&2, as well as NC4 will impact the ability of Triangle Transit to expand to a dual-track system in the future due to limited space between the former Amtrak Depot at Logan's Trading Post and the historic Cotton Mill property. After carefully reviewing the data and numerous challenges, unfortunately none of these alternatives affords a truly holistic solution.

Both current Federal and State Administrations have encouraged synergetic relationships between their respective key departments in order to focus on creating 21st Century "Smart Communities". At the Federal level - DOT, HUD and the EPA and at the State Level - NCDOT, the Department of Commerce and DENR are working together to fulfill this mission. I ask my fellow Councilors to join me in requesting the Federal Rail Administration, the USDOT, HUD and the EPA to work in concert with NCDOT and their Rail Division, the North Carolina Department of Commerce and DENR, along with the City of Raleigh Planning Staff, Raleigh DOT and the Raleigh Housing Authority to create a once in a lifetime opportunity to truly create a "Smart Community" vision for the SEHSR Corridor within Downtown Raleigh.

Therefore, I request the Council propose this partnership fund, carefully study and seriously consider extending the downtown road grid network north along the Capital Boulevard Valley to the intersection of US #1 and Wake Forest Road, aligning the SEHSR Corridor from this intersection south to West Street via an elevated viaduct shared with Triangle Transit lines over a rehabilitated and potentially realigned Pigeon House Branch watercourse integrated into a heavily landscaped urban greenway and a stormwater control system below it, creating the multi-modal transportation infrastructure needed for an urban scale mixed-use, mixed-income expansion of downtown.

With great vision and leadership the opportunity exist to reclaim the most polluted and impaired watercourse in the City of Raleigh, turning it into a major amenity, while also creating a true alternate SEHSR route down though the valley, which will protect not just one, or two, but ALL three northern downtown historic neighborhoods, simultaneously creating a multimodal transportation network for downtown growth coming with the creation of a high-speed rail and Triangle Transit hubs at the future Union Station.

But I also ask the Council to look beyond downtown to the many communities and citizens to the north and in the second phase towards the west, which has rendered far less discussion and where no viable realignment options may exist. I implore the Council to request the following mitigation measures be implemented where our existing neighborhoods and businesses about the SEHSR sealed corridor.

1. Construct brick masonry sound walls with drought resistant landscaping enhancements located on the property owner side of the walls adjacent any residential property.
2. Install brick clad retaining walls and drought resistant landscaping enhancements located on the property owner's side instead of slope easements and takings of any businesses, or residential properties where remotely feasible.
3. Install the most state-of-the-art rail bed and track designs, engine mufflers and other technological advancements to reduce train noise and vibration, regardless of existing conditions.
4. Ensure that any raised viaduct and bridge structures are architectural visual enhancements to our city and allow urban greenways in the r/o/w below the viaducts.
5. That no road closures take place along Phase I, or Phase II without 1:1 replacements. The exception being Jones Street, where a pedestrian connection and urban park should be designed with public input.
6. That where at all remotely possible, all grade separations be located under the existing rail lines in lieu of bridge interchanges in order to avoid stymieing economic development, or redevelopment and insuring multimodal interconnectivity along the corridor and future light rail stations.
7. That the Raleigh Appearance Commission work with the Passenger Rail Task Force and City Planning Staff to review and report to Council on the status of these request in the subsequent review phases of this process.
8. That the City Council request the Cary Town Council, Council have our respective planning staff work with, Triangle Transit, Triangle J Planning Staff, CAMPO and the NCDOT Rail Division together jointly to evaluate the second leg of the SEHSR Corridor west of downtown analyzing opportunities to maintain the existing road interconnectivity, the potential economic development impacts on existing businesses and future economic redevelopment, as well as how best to insure we capitalize on the maximizing the creation of half-mile diameter Transit Oriented Development Districts along the shared SEHSR | Triangle Transit sealed corridor.

Thank you for seriously considering this proposal and these measures to insure we truly are a 21 Century of Innovation, focused on environmental, cultural and economic sustainability. I humbly request you second and support my motion to forward these recommendations to the North Carolina Rail Division, as well as the Federal and State Departments listed above, along with our North Carolina US Senators and House Representatives.

Thomas G. Crowder
Raleigh City Councilor | District D