

## February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Public Meeting Notes

Congresswoman Valerie Foushee announced her original co-sponsorship of H.R. 7039 Stronger Communities Through Better Transit Act, a federal proposal to invest in more frequent trips, more routes, more buses and drivers, the basics that make the difference between good or bad service.

On Wednesday, February 7th, Bike Durham, Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, People's Alliance, Durham Congregations in Action, and Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit, and dozens of bus riders and transit supporters were joined by State Senators Natalie Murdock and Mike Woodard and County Commissioner Wendy Jacobs at a Transit Equity Week Forum.

February 4th is Rosa Parks' birthday, and for the past six years, advocates for improving public transit across the country have honored her legacy by celebrating Transit Equity Day. She was an iconic figure among many of the civil rights era who chose the tactic of refusing to give up her seat on the bus. Bike Durham executive director John Tallmadge told those assembled that "they joined others from at least 28 communities across the country in making the connection to this act of resistance to highlight the rights of all people to high-quality, affordable public transportation powered by clean/ renewable energy."

Since March 2020, GoDurham and GoTriangle bus services have been free to passengers. The lost revenues have been compensated through federal COVID-relief funding. Last year, local governments adopted the Durham County Transit Plan to prioritize spending of local sales tax revenues dedicated to transit.

In describing who will benefit from the City's proposals for new services and the extension of fare-free transit, City of Durham transit planner Jennifer Green shared statistics showing that 72% of current GoDurham riders identify as Black, and 77% report living without access to a car.

In addition to the proposed service improvements, the transit tax revenues are also programmed for better bus stops and sidewalk connections to the bus stops. GoTriangle staff member Matthew Clark, in describing their efforts to build better bus stops, said, “One thing that you notice about some bus stops in Durham is that they are literally in the ditch.” He went on to describe the progress that they are making to improve the bus stop conditions.

Though there are significant investments of local tax dollars in transit improvements, many unfunded priorities still need to be made to make transit equitable for all, requiring investments from the federal and North Carolina governments.

In a pre-recorded video message, Congresswoman Valerie Foushee shared that she was proud to be an original co-sponsor of H.R. 7039 Stronger Communities through Better Transit Act recently introduced by Rep. Hank Johnson. This bill would generate an additional \$29 million for transit operations in the Durham-Chapel Hill urbanized area if passed.

Senator Natalie Murdock shared, “When I think of the legacy of Rosa Parks, she was fighting for access to ride transit, and now the new frontier is ensuring everyone has access to the transit service. The state should provide more funding for transit services and access to transit like sidewalks.”

The Transit Equity Campaign partners with Bike Durham, Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People, People’s Alliance, Durham Congregations in Action, and Coalition for Affordable Housing and Transit to call for the continuation of fare-free transit for Durham’s low-income residents and implementation of the proposed transit improvements for the coming year. Residents can learn more about and comment on the proposal through February 21st at this website: <https://www.goforwardnc.org/durham-county-comment-period/durhamfy25wp/>.