

Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



Winter 2004/2005

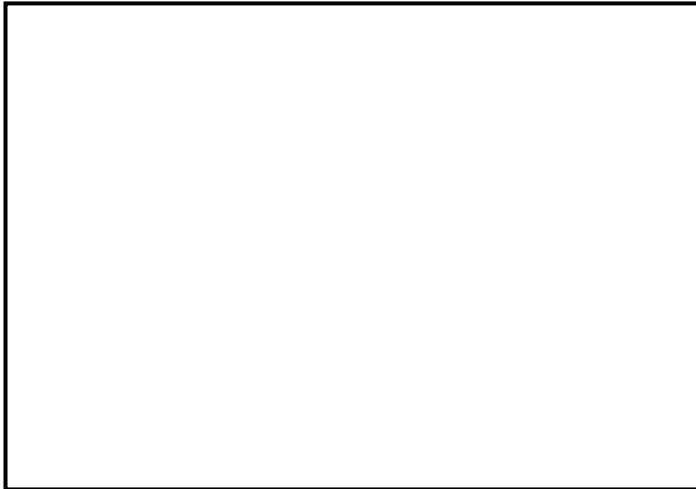
Vol. 8, Issue No. 2

Groundbreaking for South Corridor Light Rail

Ground was finally broken on February 26, 2005 for Charlotte's long planned South Corridor Light Rail project. Some preliminary work had already taken place, including demolition of structures within the right-of-way and relocation of some underground utilities. Much of the delay was waiting for approval of the balance of the full funding grant from the FTA so that actual construction could get underway on the \$427 million project. The federal government will end up paying 47%, the State of North Carolina 25% and CATS 28% of the total cost.

The South Corridor line extends 9.6 miles from 7th Street in Uptown Charlotte to I-485, just north of Pineville. The line will have 15 station stops. Trains will run every 7 1/2 minutes during rush hours and every 15 minutes at other times. Sixteen light rail cars have been ordered from Siemens, with final assembly to take place in their Sacramento, CA factory. Light rail trains will share their tracks with vintage and replica trolley cars on two miles of track between Atherton Mill in South End and 7th Street in Uptown Charlotte. The light rail trains will have a top speed of 55 MPH, with an average speed of 25 MPH when stops are included. It will take approximately 23 to 24 minutes for the trains to travel from one end of the line to the other.

CATS expects about 9,100 riders a day when the line opens, with double that number by 2025. The present estimated opening date for service on the South Corridor is March of 2007.



Mayor McCrory, CATS CEO Ron Tober and other CATS, city and county officials broke ground on the South Corridor light rail project February 26th

Charlotte Area Transit System Center City Streetcar Meetings

The CATS Center City Corridor team has scheduled public meetings to share information on various components of the streetcar project and to gather input from the public. Several meetings will take place along the corridor line and are planned to last 2 hours. Different sections of the Center City streetcar project will be discussed each night. For each section of the corridor the following information will be presented:

- Brief project overview and status
- Alignment options along the segments.
- Present possible locations for streetcar stops for discussion and feedback.
- Urban design and redevelopment opportunities

Public Meeting Dates:

Central/Hawthorne Avenue Corridor

April 26, 2005, 6:30 p.m., Eastland Mall, Activity Room, 5471 Central Avenue, Charlotte

Center City/Elizabeth Avenue Corridor

April 28, 2005, 6:30 p.m., Carole Hoefener Center Salons C & D, 610 East 7th Street, Charlotte

Beatties Ford Road Corridor

May 4, 2005, 6:30 p.m., Johnson C. Smith University, Humanities Building, Rm 108, 100 Beatties Ford Road, Charlotte

To request information or to be added to the mailing list for the Center City/Streetcar Corridor, please call 704-432-3030 or email kterrell@ci.charlotte.nc.us.

Full Funding Signing Ceremony

There will be a Full Funding signing ceremony to celebrate the full funding grant awarded the South Corridor Light Rail Project. On Friday, May 6, 2005 at 11:00 a.m., the event will take place on the old railroad right-of-way alongside Atherton Mill in South End. This right-of-way will become part of the future South Corridor Light Rail line. Although the event will not be open to the general public because of space limitations, CEMT members are welcome to attend.

Getting the North Corridor into Iredell County

At the March 23rd meeting of the Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) Mayor McCrory said time is rapidly running out for Iredell County and Mooresville to come up with their share of the financing to support building the commuter rail line up to Mooresville. He said there needs to be some action very soon on their part to secure the necessary financing or he will be unable to support sending the line beyond Mecklenburg County.

The figures for the local share of the cost, (for Iredell Co. and Mooresville) the part not paid with state and federal funding was quoted as follows:

- \$16 million to Williams Street in Mooresville.
- \$6 million to Mt. Mourne, near 1-77 and large parking facility.

We feel the need to offer our thoughts about how to proceed if Iredell County does not come up with enough to pay to extend the line into downtown Mooresville. Suppose for a minute Iredell Co. was taken out of the equation and the line was cut back to Davidson. We would still need a layover yard and something in the way of a crew facility, if only the basics. There is simply no space to put it in Davidson or Cornelius, so it would be necessary to go below Cornelius to build such a facility. If this were done an expensive and time consuming deadhead move would be required. As a matter of logistics the layover yard would probably have to be built above Davidson, in Iredell Co., even if no passenger stop were built.

Also there is no space available in downtown Davidson for a large surface parking lot, which will be very important at the terminus of the North Corridor rail line. Without this large parking facility the line will be unable to reach its full ridership potential. Even if parking could be provided in Davidson, the town does not want the extra traffic burden such a facility would bring to their downtown area. If you are building a layover yard inside Iredell why not go the extra mile or two into Mt. Mourne if you can pick up a large amount of extra ridership in the process. Lowes Corporation headquarters is there and employment at this business is expected to exceed 12,000 by 2010. Another possibility would be a terminal at Langtree Road, which is approximately 1/2 mile below Mt. Mourne. There is presently no interchange off 1-77 at this point, but there are plans to build one. If the terminal were located here construction of this interchange would have to coincide with the opening of the station.

We think the above issues makes a reasonable case for Mecklenburg County to make a rare, possibly only exception and make a substantial commitment to get the North Corridor built as far as Mt. Mourne or Langtree Road. Also we think Lowe's Corporation, possibly with some help from one or more major developers in the area, could also make a sizeable contribution toward getting trains close to their front door. With this added assistance the cost to Iredell could be cut in half. \$3 million, split between Mooresville and Iredell

County, should not be too much to ask of them. They should be able to pay for most of that out of increased tax revenue derived from a corporate giant such as the Lowe's Corporation. In fact we think it is their obligation, so that these workers can get to and from their place of employment without having to drive 1-77, and the resulting burden to traffic that will cause. For Mecklenburg County to spend some money to extend a rail line a little beyond the boundary of their taxing district is not unprecedented. For example, METRA commuter rail in Chicago extended their North Line three or four miles across the border into Kenosha, Wisconsin. Wisconsin is beyond METRA's taxing district, but because Kenosha is a sizeable city and would greatly contribute to ridership revenue it made more sense than stopping at the state line.

At some point in the future, when funding becomes available, we see the need to extend the North Corridor to downtown Mooresville and well beyond. We think Mt. Mourne or Langtree Road should be regarded as only a temporary terminus if funding cannot be found to build the entire line at this time.

CEMT has Published a New Brochure!

Citizens for Efficient Mass Transit has just released a new illustrated, full-color brochure. It promotes the idea of light rail on the Southeast corridor and modern streetcar on the West Corridor. It also promotes the advantages of light rail over busways.

If you or your civic organization is interested in obtaining a quantity of these new brochures for distribution to your members or friends please call us at 704-847-3200 or email us at cemt100@yahoo.com. You can also mail us at P. O. Box 35571, Charlotte, NC, 28235 or FAX us at 704-845-6111.

Citizens For Efficient Mass Transit



For editorial comments and correspondence:
P.O. Box 35571, Charlotte NC 28235-5571
CEMT100@Yahoo.com

Editor, Co-President, Treasurer.....Bob Bischoff
Editor, Co-President.....Martin Wheeler
Art Production/Communications Bonnie Blum

Membership Address
P.O. Box 35571, Charlotte NC 28235-5571

Visit our web site at:
<http://users.adelphia.net/~bablum/cemt.htm>

Let's Have a Unique Symbol for Our Transit Stations

The Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line in New Jersey marks each of their transit stations with the light beacon shown in the picture below. The Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority in Boston uses a large "T" in a circle to designate their stations. Many of us may be familiar with the world famous oval that indicates a London Underground station. Why not some kind of uniform symbol to make people aware of the fact they are at a CATS transit station?

This symbol could simply spell out the word CATS or we could adopt some kind of art form like Boston's "T" to express the same message, only in a different manner. Whatever we decide to use it should be clearly visible from a distance so that it can assist potential transit users unfamiliar with the general area to locate the station. In order to gain the greatest visibility whatever is designed should probably be placed at a great enough height to stand out from the surrounding landscape, yet not be too obtrusive. It could be placed on a simple pole or, even better, placed atop some type of attractive art form.

Whatever is decided upon should meet two requirements. First it should be of uniform design at all transit stations so that its repetition will, within a short time, make it easily recognizable to all regular transit patrons. It should be placed not only at all light rail and commuter rail stations, but also at the new bus center hubs now being constructed.

The second requirement we would suggest is that these transit symbols (notice we have avoided the use of the word "signs") be in reasonable harmony with the neighborhoods in which they are placed. They should be able to attract attention without detracting from the appearance of the surroundings which they serve.

Maybe this is something to placate the transit artists, who may have become frustrated by the recent funding cutbacks for artwork at transit stations. We could have a contest among these artists to design the best station symbol. While artwork has been cut back to that which is incorporated into the stations or transit structures themselves, we think these station symbols

could justifiably be considered a functional part of the stations. They certainly will perform a very useful purpose.

Who knows, one day these transit station symbols could help to define Charlotte in the same manner the "T" defines Boston, or the oval defines London and its Underground.

How Often Will Trolley Operate?

A recent editorial in the *Charlotte Business Journal* seems to conclude that the Charlotte Trolley is only an expensive novelty that City Hall dreamed up. They say "It's a dubious proposition, at best, that developers spent hundreds of millions of dollars on commercial and residential projects to tie into a toy train." We have heard this same thing before from other naysayers. Yet we can remember little substantial development in the South End prior to the arrival of the Trolley. We think that the Trolley provided the spark, without which little if any of the development in South End would have occurred.

The Trolley may not be the sole reason the hundreds of millions were spent, but it provided the momentum without which it is very likely none of it would have happened.

That said we move on to another statement in the same editorial which said whenever the light rail system operates every 15 minutes or less, trolley service will be suspended. *The Business Journal* said "In practice, the Trolley will run mostly at night and on weekends."

We are unaware of the fact that CATS has made any such decision. We think it is quite clear the Trolley won't be running during the very busy morning and evening rush hour periods. However we think it might be a mistake not to run the Trolley during midday period on weekdays, when we believe CATS is planning to operate on 15 minute headways.

We think it is particularly important during lunch hour and early afternoons, when sizeable numbers of businessmen, conventioners and tourists will be moving from Uptown to South End restaurants and back. By providing trolley service from 10 am to 3 pm, for example, you have captured the lunch hour crowd and still have left a reasonable window of opportunity for tourists, locals and school children to enjoy a ride on the Trolley. Eliminate any midday trolley service on weekdays and you have closed the door to many school children's chances of ever riding the Trolley.

The *Business Journal* editorial goes on to say light rail will travel much faster than the Trolley, suggesting that trolleys will get in the way of light rail. However we don't see that as being a major problem in the restricted area in which the trolleys

operate. With station stops spaced only three or four blocks apart on the average between South End and Uptown there is no way for light rail to attain the higher speeds it is capable of. Also we feel operation of the Trolley in midday could actually be a benefit to light rail by offering more frequent service in

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Photo by Tom Nemeth

Station symbol on Hudson-Bergen light rail.

Pineville Strikes Out Again

When Pineville decided it didn't want light rail running into their downtown area we thought they made a big mistake. However it was their town and CATS said it was their decision to make.

Now comes word their historic old railway station has been demolished. The station was moved from Pineville to south Charlotte about 30 years ago. Its appearance was altered and it was turned into a restaurant. It stood in the path of the South Corridor light rail project and CATS said it had to be moved. However they did offer Pineville the opportunity to move the station back to Pineville. The town officials of Pineville declined the offer sighting the expense and the building's structural problems.

Dan Morrill, director of the Historic Landmarks Commission, did say the station had lost its historic value when it was moved off its original site and substantially altered. However this does not mean the station couldn't have been restored to its original appearance if the desire was there to make it happen. Matthews had that desire to preserve and maintain a significant piece of their history when they fully restored their historic old depot to a spot near its original location. Today it is one of the chief landmarks in their downtown area.

In fairness to Pineville it must be said the problems facing Pineville in doing what Matthews did were much greater. The station had been moved a considerable distance from its original site and its condition was fragile. Any smaller town such as Pineville has a limit on the amount of money they can spend on non-essential items such as historical preservation. Many smaller communities have however made great efforts to

save their historic train stations, recognizing them as one of their most important links with the past. We think it is sad that Pineville couldn't find a way to preserve such an important piece of their history.

How Often Will Trolley Operate?

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their more densely populated local service area. By absorbing some of this ridership the Trolley would take the pressure off light rail to make more lengthy stops at the tightly spaced close-in stations. The result would be that light rail would be speeded up and better able to offer the fast, efficient service that people boarding at the outlying stations will demand.

Our final point in suggesting that the Trolley offer more than just evening and weekend service is to reflect on the amount of energy and investment that has already gone into the Charlotte Trolley. With the restoration of car #85, and the purchase of three replica trolleys, it seems to us that to confine operation of the Trolley to such a few hours every week would constitute an under-utilized investment.

We suggest that CATS at least try to run both light rail and the Trolley during the midday on weekdays. If our predictions prove unfounded and there is not enough demand to run both light rail and the Trolley at midday, service can always be withdrawn. The last time we visited Portland, Oregon we seemed to remember vintage trolleys interspersed with their light rail trains in midday service downtown. If it is not a problem for Portland should it be a problem for us?

Your Membership Will Help Us Help You!

Please help us continue our fight for the best possible transit system for the Charlotte area. Become a member of Citizen's for Efficient Mass Transit. We are a totally volunteer, non-profit organization.

Your membership entitles you to one year of the quarterly CEMT Newsletter and occasional news releases. We monitor all public transit meetings. Please take a minute to help us keep you informed. Thank you!

Name _____

Address _____

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Phone (____) _____ Fax (____) _____

Mail this section with your check or money order to:

Bob Bischoff, Treasurer
Citizens for Efficient Mass Transit
P.O. Box 35571
Charlotte NC 28235-5571

Citizens for Efficient Mass Transit Membership

Annual membership dues rate:

- Regular / Individual \$15.00
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