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# Triangle could see light rail system

## Sales tax increase would fund project

BY DEVIN ROONEY  
STATE AND NATIONAL EDITOR

JULY 3 — The Special Transit Advisory Commission's proposal for light rail in the Triangle might be getting a boost if a bill in the N.C. House of Representatives, sponsored by N.C. Rep. Becky Carney, D-Mecklenburg, gets passed.

The bill went to a vote before the House in June but was passed back into committee.

The bill would allow counties to hold referenda to impose a half-cent sales tax that would help fund and earn matching funds for new mass transportation systems.

It's modeled after the same sys-

tem Charlotte used to get its light rail and bus system, which began operation in 2007.

The funding could be used to support the \$2 billion transportation development plan, which includes light rail, proposed earlier this spring by the Special Transit Advisory Commission.

It would increase bus services and build light rail and diesel motor lines to increase the amount of public transporta-

tion options in Orange, Durham, Wake, Franklin, Johnston and Chatham counties.

But plans are still in the works, said Kenneth Withrow, senior transportation planner for Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization.

"There has not been any closure on that at all," Withrow said.

CAMPO was part of the Special Transit Advisory Commission, although Withrow himself was not

part of the commission.

The Durham-Chapel Hill-Carrboro Metropolitan Planning Organization also was involved in the process of designing the potential light rail system for the Triangle and deciding how to integrate the system into the area.

The key to the project, commission co-chairman George Cianciolo told The Daily Tar Heel in February, is getting Triangle residents excited about the project.

"This would set the tone for what's coming," he added.

"You want to convince people that transit will work for them so when you bring other modes on line, they'll be immediately ready to use that."

The commission met from May 2007 to April 2008 and presented its final report to the planning organizations at a joint meeting May 21.

The central part of the plan is to build 56 miles of light rail by 2020, including a line from Chapel Hill to Durham. A heavier rail system would connect Durham, Cary, Raleigh and the airport.

Weekday ridership on a light-rail system in Charlotte, which opened in December 2007, has been 136 percent higher than estimated.

Charlotte funded its light-rail system with state and federal grants, as well as a half-cent sales tax akin to the commission's proposed hike for the Triangle.

The recent transit proposal follows a Triangle Transit Authority plan that was proposed in 1995 and died in 2006. At that time, the TTA planned an \$810 million light-rail system to connect Durham and Chapel Hill.

The failed plan wasn't Triangle-wide, and the projected ridership numbers were a bit too low to justify its construction, Cianciolo told The Daily Tar Heel in February.

But Joe Milazzo, executive director of the Regional Transportation Alliance, said this revamped network will be useful for more than just drivers.

"Pedestrians and bicyclists would be able to take advantage of the corridors, as well."

Staff Writer Greg Smith  
contributed reporting.  
Contact the State & National  
Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

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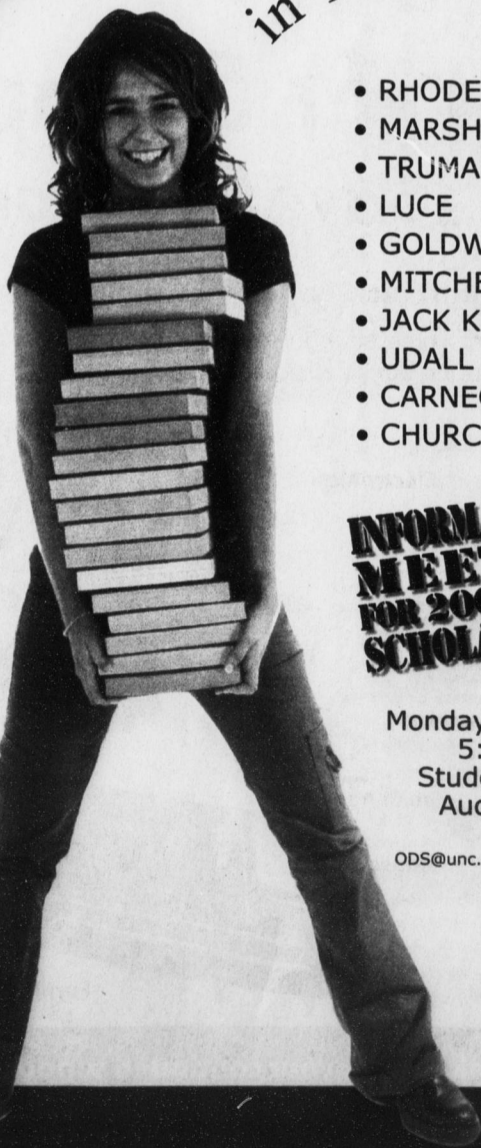
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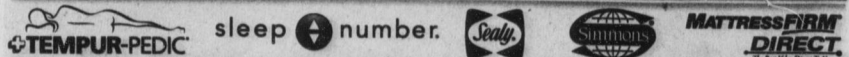
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