

Duke University
Durham
North Carolina 27708-0001

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOX 90001

TELEPHONE (919) 684-2424
FACSIMILE (919) 684-3050

November 19, 2018

Mayor Steve Schewel
City of Durham

Commissioner Wendy Jacobs
Chair, Board of County Commissioners
Durham County

Dear Steve and Wendy,

Thank you for your patience as many of us at Duke University have worked with GoTriangle to consider your request for a voluntary contribution of land, rights-of-way and money for the Durham-Orange Light Rail Transit project. You and your colleagues on the City Council, County Commission, state and local agencies, are to be commended for your passionate commitment to our community, and for the persistence and vision that have led to the ambitious plan that is currently under consideration.

As Durham's largest private employer, health care provider, and investor -- through more than \$2 billion in construction of facilities just along the proposed path of the light rail -- Duke very much supports a transit solution for the city and the region that provides opportunity and access for all. After considerable deliberation, however, we believe that critical aspects of the currently proposed route present significant risk to both Duke University and the community.

To be clear, Duke is vitally interested in the success of Durham and the region. The university has a century-long record of service and investment in our city. We are also proud to be an underwriter of public education and supporter of arts and culture, and we have recently made nearly \$10 million in new commitments to public and nonprofit agencies to address the affordable housing challenges in Durham. And, over the past five years, Duke has spent almost \$5 million on local and regional mass transit passes and bus routes for employees, students and the community. All of this partnership and investment is anchored in the belief that Duke has a founding obligation to serve society.

As you know, we have engaged with GoTriangle, the city and county over many years on a number of issues regarding the planned route, and we will continue to do so. But numerous and quite significant problems remain unresolved, in particular the proposal to route and then elevate the line along Erwin Road which was never agreed to by the university, and in fact was identified as unworkable in correspondence going back almost two decades.

In the hope we might yet find a workable solution, I want to highlight the most critical areas of concern for Duke.

First, the current plan to close Blackwell Street would be devastating to downtown Durham's dynamic, mixed-use environment. Duke has proudly partnered with the City of Durham and Capitol Broadcasting Company to create the American Tobacco Campus, the Durham Bulls Athletic Park and the Durham Performing Arts Center, investing more than \$300 million and relocating more than 4,000 Duke employees to downtown. The result of this venture is a thriving arts, culture, residential and business district that connects seamlessly to Main Street and Central Park.

The last-minute decision to close Blackwell Street – and the lack of a consensus and funding for a signature civic space to fill the gap – risks severing that critical connection and bifurcating one of Durham's most vibrant areas. We are hard pressed to support this action and urge you to dedicate the time and resources to find a way now to ensure that downtown can continue to grow and thrive.

Second, despite the good faith efforts from both Duke and GoTriangle over a period of years to navigate the challenges of designing and constructing a mass transit rail line at the front steps of a busy hospital and Durham's only Level I trauma center, we continue to have grave concerns about the potential impact that the Erwin Road route will have on Duke's operations and, much more importantly, the vital health and safety of the community. This is why we have consistently indicated over many years that finding another route would be far better for the ongoing safety and economic vitality of our city.

Let me cite the most important unresolved issues and the steps we believe it will take to address them:

- The adverse impact on our ability to provide emergency care to our community has always been a paramount concern, and it remains unaddressed despite good-faith efforts of GoTriangle planners. As the only Level I trauma center for Durham, and inarguably the most critical part of the entire health care ecosystem for a thriving and growing metropolitan area, the Emergency Department at Duke Hospital must be accessible at all times and prepared for every eventuality. The current plan to place concrete barriers and piers in middle of Erwin Road will create difficult and perhaps dangerous conditions that could have tragic consequences. The barriers eliminate the ability for ambulances to cross over and use other lanes, thus potentially reducing the survival of critically ill patients being transported to Duke.
- The planned route is adjacent to numerous medical and research facilities, like the Duke Eye Center, in which extremely delicate procedures are performed. While we appreciate GoTriangle's pledge to build to the appropriate noise and vibration standards, experience elsewhere in the country makes clear that even the best-planned transit projects, when located too near such facilities, can create disruptive interference with sensitive laboratory and clinical activities. We will require demonstrated testing and analysis in

advance to ensure that the procedures performed in our buildings, such as laser eye surgery, will not be negatively affected during construction and afterwards.

- Duke currently conducts critical research on vaccines in the Global Health Research Building (GHRB). Under the terms of the multi-year grant from the National Institutes of Health that supports this life-saving but potentially hazardous work, Duke is required to maintain a 100-foot buffer in all directions to protect the building from accidental or intentional harm. This route appears to compromise the required buffer.
- The circular entrance to the Duke Eye Center needs to be maintained at the minimum safety standard for vision-impaired patients, as it was designed. In addition, the planned construction calls for all work to be done during normal daylight hours and will require the entire Eye Center circle to be closed for three weeks at a time. There is no other convenient entrance to the Eye Center, the specialized equipment cannot be moved, and it is not available anywhere else in the region.
- The current GoTriangle construction plan indicates that Trent Drive – the principal access point for Duke clinics, the Duke Cancer Institute, the Duke Medicine Pavilion, and School of Nursing – could also be closed for weeks at a time over a period of years and that traffic would be diverted down Flowers Drive. We estimate this will result in a quick and substantial reduction in patient care volume and revenue that will cause severe budget pressures at Duke University Health System. The result will be the loss of hundreds, perhaps thousands of jobs at all levels. This would be both socially and economically disastrous, risking both public health and employment in our community.
- We appreciate that GoTriangle now recognizes the public-safety urgency and importance of protecting the 44 kva electricity line that runs under the proposed route and provides power to the entire Duke campus and medical center. A loss of power, even temporary, could prove catastrophic; nevertheless, we have yet to receive a plan approved and indemnified by Duke Energy that guarantees the continuous, interruption-free operation of the electrical feed and its eventual replacement.
- The planned crossing at grade at NC-751 and Erwin Road presents a dangerous situation at an intersection that is heavily traveled in morning and afternoon rush hours, and for many special events on the Duke campus. An aerial crossing of that intersection is essential to maintain both safety and efficiency for drivers, pedestrians and riders.

We want to be a partner, indeed a leader, in creating a solution to this region's transportation and mobility challenges and provide opportunities for all citizens to participate in our community. We have worked constructively with GoTriangle and our local and regional governments to overcome these significant obstacles. But the unfortunate truth is that we have not yet arrived at a viable, mutually agreeable plan that we can responsibly, much less enthusiastically, endorse. The potential risks of certain aspects of the proposed route to the health, safety and economic well-being of the community and the university are simply, at this point, too great.

We deeply wish it were otherwise, and that after decades of planning we were not left in this unfortunate position now, as external deadlines for project financing force us into risky public decision making. I assure you that, if the outstanding issues can be definitively resolved in a straightforward and mutually agreeable way, Duke will be an eager and avid advocate for the region-wide transit plan that we hope will be a national model.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Price". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "V" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Vincent E. Price
President

cc: City Manager Tom Bonfield
County Manager Wendell Davis
Commissioner Ellen Reckhow, Chair, GoTriangle Board of Directors
Jeff Mann, GoTriangle