



Shared Corridor Commuter Rail Capacity Study Frequently Asked Questions

Why did NCRR do this study?

We've been asked many times if commuter trains could operate on the same tracks that are carrying freight and Amtrak. We believed it was time to answer that question and estimate the costs. Now citizens, government officials, and business leaders can determine where they want to go from here. The North Carolina Railroad corridor is a great asset for this state. We want to maximize its benefits for business and industry, economic development and passenger service.

Can commuter trains operate on the same tracks that are carrying freight and Amtrak?

Yes, if certain conditions are met. NCRR's freight agreement with Norfolk Southern makes provision for commuter service if the trains do not affect freight service operations. A key part of the study used modeling techniques to identify potential bottlenecks if rush hour commuter trains were added to the current rail traffic. This showed us where we would have to add tracks, bridges and sidings. That's how the cost estimate was determined.

What would it cost?

It would cost around a billion dollars for track improvements, stations, and 13 train sets (locomotives and cars) to serve the entire 141-mile study area. It is important to realize that the system could be built in manageable phases. For our study, we looked at four routes:

Burlington to Greensboro-\$212,928,810
Burlington to West Durham-\$55,942,676
Goldsboro to Raleigh-\$115,732,899
Raleigh to West Durham-\$249,257,179
University Station Road to Chapel Hill-\$23,609,055

As a result of this study should people feel more or less optimistic about the outlook for commuter rail if they live and work in the seven county area between Goldsboro and Greensboro?

They should feel better because for the first time, we know physically it can be done, and we know the capital costs. The question of funding is a big one. But the rising costs of energy, congested highways, and growing population may motivate local and state leaders to pursue funding.. Between now and 2030, North Carolina Railroad will continue making gradual improvements to the tracks in the corridor. That will eventually make the corridor much more ready for commuter service, but significant additional funding would be needed. Most commuter rail projects in the U. S. are funded with 50% federal, 25% state, and 25% local funding for capital costs.

If capital could be raised how long would it take to build the necessary infrastructure to run the schedule you have outlined for each route?

Each route would require different projects. For instance, a route between Goldsboro and Raleigh could be operational in 5 years or less from the start of construction. This is because NCRR has spent nearly \$25 million in the last three years to install passing sidings and modernize signaling. NCRR also made room for double tracks when replacing the RTP bridge over Highway 54 several years ago. On the other hand, the railroad between Durham and Greensboro is mostly single track. It will require more infrastructure to handle both freight and commuter trains and therefore be more costly per mile.

What about doing a similar study for the Greensboro to Charlotte portion of the corridor?

We will take a look at that, but no decision has been made at this time. It is important to note that the Greensboro to Charlotte segment of NCRR serves as a part of Norfolk Southern's main line and as many as 70 freight trains and eight Amtrak trains currently operate on it daily. Charlotte already has a detailed plan for commuter rail for the greater Charlotte area.

If rush hour commuter service between Raleigh and Durham is implemented what impact will that have on the Special Transit Advisory Commission plan?

This study shows how to build rush hour commuter service between Raleigh and Durham with stops along the way in Cary and RTP on tracks shared with freight trains. The STAC plan suggested operating trains throughout the day between Chapel Hill and Durham, and Cary to North Raleigh, etc., and the possibility of commuter rail on other Triangle area routes. There is enough room in the NCRR corridor to build both a commuter rail system and a light rail system because the corridor is 200 feet wide. Neither system would exclude the other, but both require that NCRR and interested communities take an active role in protecting the corridor.

Does Norfolk Southern endorse the information that you have laid out in this study?

Norfolk Southern has been part of the entire process leading up to the study. They were very helpful in sharing their plans for the future and their schedules. Our agreement with Norfolk Southern recognizes that there can be commuter services within the corridor if enough tracks are built. The first priority is that we do not interrupt the operation of the freight trains 24/7. This is important because rail-served businesses create thousands of jobs and boost North Carolina's economy. Also, freight trains help keep long distance trucks off our congested highways.

How many freight trains operate daily in the Greensboro to Goldsboro portion of your corridor?

There are 10 to 12 freight trains a day on the line; between Greensboro and Goldsboro. Amtrak has 6 trains per day between Raleigh and Cary, 4 per day between Raleigh and Selma and 4 per day between Cary and Greensboro.

With an average of one freight train per hour on this line, would it be possible to operate light rail trains on the existing or improved tracks?

No. Freight movement is mostly during the day, including rush hours when light rail traffic would be heaviest. Under federal law, light rail cars are not allowed with freight trains on the same tracks, and there are safety and congestion issues. However, light rail on separate dedicated tracks with proper separation---25 feet or more—is allowed on the NCRR line under the agreement with Norfolk Southern. Most light rail lines are powered by overhead electric wires, which is incompatible with diesel powered freight engines and freight cars.

How many colleges and universities could be served if the entire system were built?

Fifteen colleges and universities and three community colleges are very close or directly adjacent to the rail line.

North Carolina Railroad Company
2809 Highwoods Blvd. Suite 100
Raleigh, North Carolina 27604
919-954-7601
www.ncrr.com