

MANDATORY REFERRAL REPORT NO. 10-15
Proposed Real Estate Acquisition for LYNX Blue Line Extension (BLE)

PROJECT PROPOSAL AND LOCATION:

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) is implementing a Right-Of-Way (ROW) Acquisition and Relocation Program for the LYNX BLE Light Rail Project. The Project includes the construction of a light rail system between Uptown Charlotte and University of North Carolina Charlotte. The corridor will be approximately 9.35 miles in length with 11 station locations. The Project alignment will primarily be within or along North Carolina Railroad (NCRR), Norfolk Southern Railroad (NSRR), North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), and University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) right-of-way. Also included in the Project are four Park and Ride facilities to accommodate the commuting public. Implementation of the Northeast Corridor Light Rail Project will facilitate the following improvements:

- Reduced vehicular traffic and congestion in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg County area;
- Increased transit travel options;
- Improved air quality in the metropolitan area.

The Project is anticipated to include approximately 221 parcels for track alignment, stations, and other light rail facilities. Current parcel uses include vacant land and lands adjacent to or contiguous with existing street or railroad right of way, industrial and commercial uses and residential properties. The Project may also include a lease with (or the partial acquisition of) NCRR, NCDOT, UNCC and NSRR right of way.

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION:

The purpose of the proposed LYNX Blue Line Extension is to ensure future mobility by providing a transportation alternative in a highly congested travel corridor and to support the region's land use policies and goals for a sustainable growth and development pattern. The proposed project would provide high-capacity, fixed guideway transit service in the corridor. This new service would offer a convenient, time-competitive travel alternative and reduce dependence on single occupant automobiles. As an extension of the LYNX Blue Line, the proposed project would enhance the operating effectiveness of CATS' light rail service and leverage the public investment already made in the South Corridor.

The project would also support the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*, 2010, for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region. As envisioned in the region's combined transit and land use plans, future development would be focused into areas that can support new development or are in need of redevelopment and away from areas that cannot support new growth. The highest density development would be encouraged around rapid transit stations. By focusing future growth in corridors with multiple travel alternatives, the region would be able to grow in a manner that promotes continued access and mobility and that enhances the quality of life for residents and employees.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED PUBLIC POLICIES:

In 1994, the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County adopted the *Centers and Corridors Concept Plan*, a vision of how the region should grow over the long-term. The Concept Plan, updated in 2010, and now called the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*, June 2010, builds on the region's existing framework of centers and corridors, focusing future development in these areas and preserving lower density development and open space between corridors. The original document focused on "Centers" and "Corridors" as the key to integrating land uses and transportation. The updated document includes recommendations for areas that exist between the corridors known as "Wedges" and expands the focus to include public facilities, infrastructure and the environment. Plan recommendations include a future, fixed guideway transit system in the region's five primary transportation corridors. This new rapid transit system would provide travel choices for residents and employees, improve regional and corridor connectivity, reduce dependence on single-occupant

vehicles, and ensure future mobility. The Northeast Corridor (LYNX BLE) is one of the five corridors identified in the *Centers, Corridors and Wedges Growth Framework*, June 2010.

CONSISTENCY WITH ADOPTED LAND USE PLANS:

The BLE lies within several adopted land use plans including the *Northeast District Plan* (1996), the *Central District Plan* (1993) and the *University City Area Plan (UCAP)* (2007). Concept plans for the proposed stations have been completed and station area plans have been adopted for four stations in the *UCAP*. The district plans did not reference the transit project and the concept plans are used to determine appropriate land uses within station areas. Within the coming months, transit station area plans will be completed for the remaining proposed stations and plan amendments will be completed for the stations that have been modified within the *UCAP*.

PROJECT IMPACT:

This transit project will provide new transit choices and development options. Construction of this project will provide additional opportunities for transit oriented development within the Northeast Corridor.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PROJECTS:

The LYNX BLE is well coordinated with several public (City, County and State) and private projects. The following is a list of those projects and their sponsors:

29/49 Weave Project- CDOT

Greenways- County Park & Rec.

Charlotte Railroad Improvement & Safety Program (CRISP)- NCDOT Rail Div.

- Sugar Creek Grade Separation
- 36th Street Grade Separation
- AC&W Relocation
- Freight Railroad Double Tracking
- Northend Bypass

UNC Charlotte Masterplan

First Ward Park Masterplan- Private Development

ESTIMATED PROJECT COMPLETION DATE:

The LYNX BLE is funded through Preliminary Engineering and Final Design. However the completion of construction and beginning of Light Rail operations is dependent on local sales tax revenue.

JOINT USE TASK FORCE REVIEW COMMENTS:

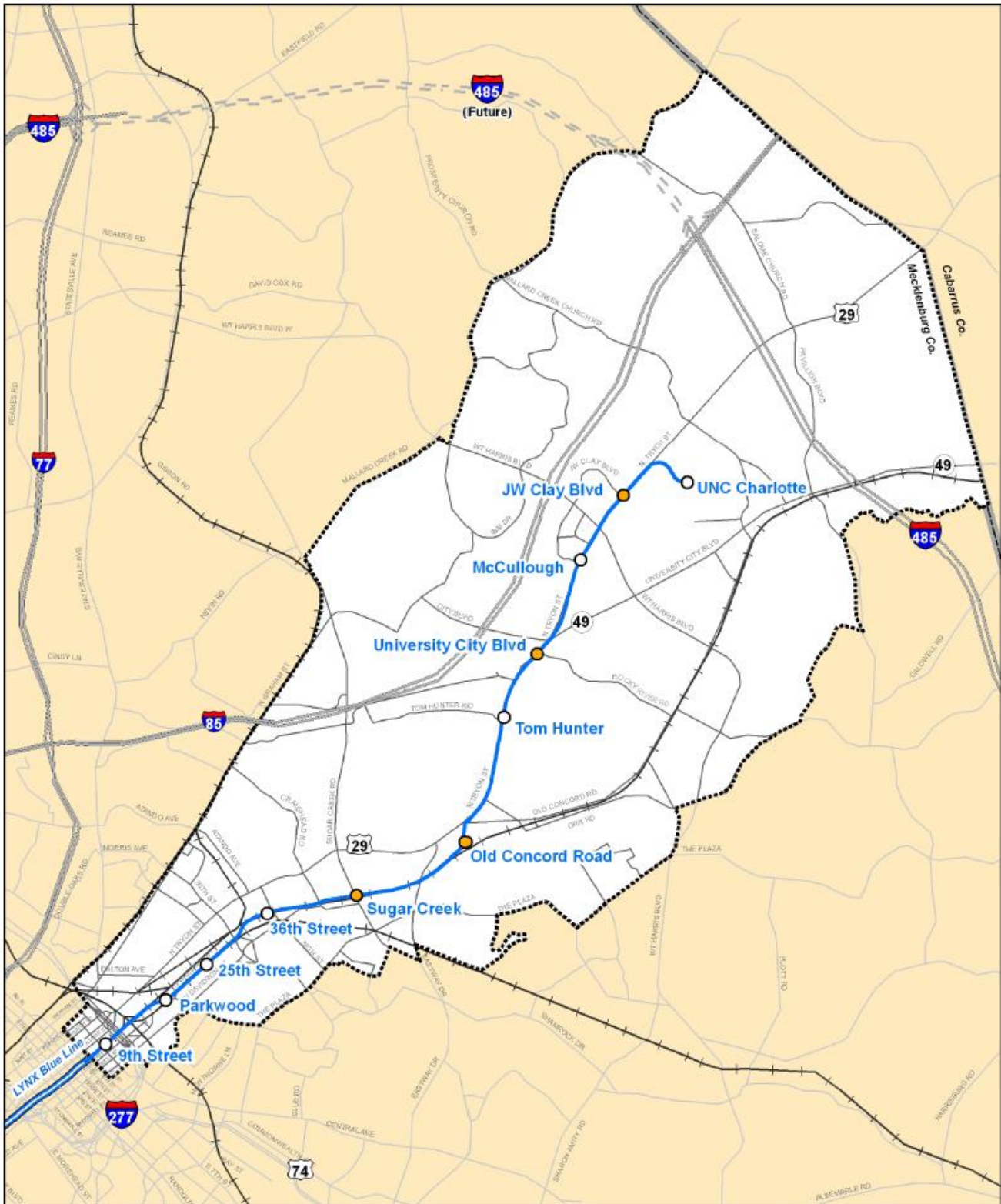
The Joint Use Task Force discussed this matter at their July 7, 2010 meeting and no joint use comments were offered.

PLANNING STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends approval of the proposed land acquisition for the intended purpose.

CMPC PLANNING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

At their May 17, 2011 meeting the Planning Committee recommended approval by a 6-0 vote.



Legend

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| Northeast Corridor Limits | Railroads |
| Light Rail Transit | Highway |
| LYNX Existing Light Rail Transit | Major Roads |
| Proposed Stations | Highway (Future) |
| Proposed Stations with Park-and-Ride | County Line |



Data Source:
 CATS, City of Charlotte GIS, and Mecklenburg County
 GIS



