



First Year Report

August 2010 - August 2011

Photo Credit: Jessie Gladin-Kramer Photography 2011

On August 16, 2010, the City, in partnership with Duke University, launched a new type of service to Durham. This service has been well received by riders – students, workers, and residents who live downtown or at Duke, as well as by the Durham public.

The service design – simple, direct, and frequent – is a model that should be considered for other parts of the community. This report recounts the highlights of the first full year of operation of the Bull City Connector.

Success Built on Partnerships

The vision for this new service was for more than a bus route, but a new connection between the Downtown and Duke to the west, and renewing neighborhoods to the east. This has been more than just the connection of physical places with the service, but also the connection of people and their institutions with the planning, design, marketing, and implementation of the services.

The City and Duke University collaborated to design the service with members of the community (led by Durham Area Designers) and to fund the service jointly with help from a federal transit grant. North Carolina Central University is connected to this new service through the NCCU Connection which allows students, faculty and staff with NCCU identification cards to ride DATA Route 5 for free between their campus and downtown Durham.

Since October 1, 2010, Triangle Transit, First Transit (a transit management company), and the Durham City Transportation Company (DCTC) have worked together to deliver the service on a daily basis.

A list of institutions involved in the Bull City Connector's first year is provided below:

- City of Durham
- Duke University and Medical Center
- Durham Area Designers
- Durham Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Downtown Durham, Inc.
- North Carolina Central University
- Triangle Transit
- Durham City Transit Company (DCTC)
- First Transit
- Golden Belt

Direct. Free. Frequent.

The Bull City Connector is a simple, direct route connecting downtown Durham and Durham Station with Duke University and its Medical Center along Main Street and Erwin Road to the west, and with Golden Belt using Main Street to the east. The route is frequent, running every 15 minutes on weekdays until 7pm and every 20 minutes at night and Saturdays. Importantly, the route is free to the riding public.

The service is provided using fuel-efficient hybrid diesel-electric buses that stand out as they run down the street because of their highly visible coloring and design. This unique brand for the Bull City Connector has been carried through to the bus stops, operator uniforms, and marketing materials that are visible and available at many of the locations along the Connector.

The NCCU Connection is a fare-free offering for students, faculty, and staff at North Carolina Central University on DATA route 5 between Durham Station and the campus.

A Highly Visible Brand

The launch of the Bull City Connector / NCCU Connection service was led by the City of Durham in cooperation with a marketing team including Duke Communications office, Durham's Convention and Visitors Bureau, Downtown Durham, Inc., North Carolina Central University and other downtown Durham stakeholders.

The team created distinctive materials and bus stop signs, a highly visible bus wrap, a new website, and partnerships with businesses and institutions along the route that display posters, schedules, and stickers on-site. To date, over 60,000 pocket guides and 550 posters have been distributed at more than 150 other key destinations throughout the city.

Information about the Bull City Connector is promoted on the City of Durham website, partner websites, such as DCVB and the Durham Arts Council, City publications and through social media channels. Duke University has made several short videos illustrating how the Bull City Connector can be a fun and easy way to get around. Building on the early marketing success of the launch period, the City recently worked with a marketing consultant to research potential customers and develop a marketing plan for the upcoming year. The research showed that visitors and downtown Durham and Duke employees present the best growth opportunity. The marketing plan uses a four-part strategy to grow ridership: enlisting partners to spread the word, aligning with Durham's social calendar, creating trial use through promotions and special events, and educating potential riders about the details.

First Year Performance

The service has been well-received by customers and the community.

- By the end of the first full year of Bull City Connector service, there were 1,636 customer boardings on the average weekday. While this is short of the first year goal, it is still on a growth trajectory from each of the prior quarters.
- 75% of customers rated their experience on the Bull City Connector as very good or excellent in an April survey.
- 86% of respondents who live or work in central Durham are aware of the service and 83% have seen the bus.

- At public meetings, citizens routinely request that the Bull City Connector come to their neighborhood or business district.
- Survey data showed that the Bull City Connector attracted new riders and promoted additional utilization of DATA services.

Total Bull City Connector Boardings

- Total Bull City Connector customers of 324,670
- Total NCCU Connection customers of 20,075
- 3 month target was 1,125 daily customers, actual was 1,334 daily customers.
- 6 month target was 1,575 daily customers, actual was 1,421 daily customers
- One year target was 2,025 daily customers, actual was 1,636 customers

The most significant problem for the service is inconsistent on-time performance. While 50% of customers rated on-time performance as very good or excellent, 12% rated it as poor or very poor. We have observed that on-street commercial loading activity, high passenger loadings on the bus, and wheelchair loadings on the bus all present serious challenges to keeping the bus on-time. In response, the following measures have been taken:

- The City has worked on stepped up enforcement of the vehicle loading zone activity and identification of several intersections where transit signal priority can be used to reduce bus travel times.
- Triangle Transit has also consolidated some bus stops and re-routed the service near Durham Station to shorten travel times.
- DCTC has been changing its dispatching procedures to better maintain the spacing between buses to shorten the wait time between buses.

Upcoming Improvements

The City, Duke and other partners have plans to build on the first-year success of the Bull City Connector including:

Fall 2011

- Creating a marketing advisory council to implement the new marketing plan.
- Increasing university outreach including student tours.
- Installing shelters with art integrated into the glass panels at 13 stops along the route. Art provided by local artists David Wilson Christopher Vespermann, Al Frega, and Sharon Dowell, with the assistance of Steve Gaddis and Dan Jewell from Durham Area designers.
- Providing real-time bus arrival information through text message, smartphone apps, and a mobile website. This data will be open to the public so that app developers can come up with their own ideas.

Spring 2012

- Using new buses with perimeter seating that accommodates more passenger standing room starting in Spring 2012
- Evaluating route extensions to the west toward LaSalle Street and to the east toward either Driver Street and Angier Avenue or North Carolina Central University

Summer 2012

- Installing pilot applications of transit signal priority at three intersections.
- Identifying park-and-ride opportunities along the route

Lessons Learned

The Bull City Connector service design – simple, direct, and frequent – is a model that should be considered for other parts of the community. The unique brand, both the name and the highly visible coloring and logo, communicates that this will be a different experience than on the DATA routes, but that it offers important connections within the transit network. This message has attracted new riders who otherwise haven't been using bus services in Durham. As the City's Transportation Department and Triangle Transit work on the Designing Better Bus Service plan for making improvements to the entire Durham bus network, we will look for opportunities to apply these lessons to services in other travel corridors. The goal is to improve the service quality for current customers and to broaden the appeal of bus services in Durham.

DURHAM



1869
CITY OF MEDICINE

Duke
UNIVERSITY

A service provided by the City of Durham and Duke University with the support of community partners



Photo Credit: Jessie Gladin-Kramer Photography 2011