



October 7, 2020

Mr. John M. Lewis Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
Charlotte Area Transit System
600 East 4th Street
Charlotte, NC 28202
john.lewis@charlottenc.gov

Dear Mr. Lewis:

The CATS Silver Line is strongly supported by residents of the MoRA community and, by expanding development of mass transit, the City of Charlotte will serve the residents of this corridor as the Blue Line has along its corridor. As a grass roots community organization devoted to shaping the rebirth of Monroe Road, MoRA has closely followed planning for the Silver Line. Light rail, along with related bus, pedestrian, and cycling improvements, presents a landmark opportunity to expand transportation options, promote economic opportunity, and enhance social equity.

However, you will see below that we have serious concerns about some of the alignment options recently discussed for the Silver Line, given their potential to restrict redevelopment prospects in the Monroe Road corridor rather than enhance those prospects. We would like to request another meeting with CATS representatives to further discuss our concerns.

MoRA commends your team's hard work to gauge public attitudes toward potential Silver Line alignments. MoRA residents and businesses as well as MoRA representatives participated in last month's Silver Line Virtual Public Meetings. After careful deliberation, we (Monroe Road Advocates) have developed the following observations and recommendations regarding the options between Charlottetowne Avenue and Interstate 485 –in and near the Monroe Road corridor.

Charlottetowne Ave. to Idlewild Rd.

We strongly urge CATS to forego Option 2 and follow either the Locally Preferred Alternative or Option 1.

We envision either the LPA or Option 1 driving development of a vibrant, highly walkable community that offers the Silver Line on one side and Monroe Road on the other, with many connections in between. The Bojangles Coliseum-Ovens Auditorium complex is a logical centerpiece.

On the other hand, as your staff acknowledged during the September 22 Virtual Public Meeting, Option 2 would eliminate many opportunities for transit-oriented development along and near Monroe Road. Even with a pedestrian bridge linking a Silver Line station to Bojangles-Ovens, we see Independence Boulevard being a “moat” between the Monroe Road corridor and the transit line, greatly discouraging transit-oriented development. Pedestrian and bicycle access to the Silver Line from the Monroe Road corridor would be greatly complicated.

CATS says Option 2 would reduce travel times, but so far has provided no specifics. Surely, the savings would be relatively small, far outweighed by significantly greater economic development opportunities via the LPA or Option 1. Also, the Gold Line's extension along Central Avenue should provide its own redevelopment boost for the other side of Independence Boulevard.

Idlewild Rd. to Just South of I-485 at CPCC Levine

We strongly recommend against Transition Options 1B and 1C. In this area the Silver Line's promotion of Monroe Road revitalization can be most direct, even with the potential challenges of all options. Reconstruction of Monroe Road indeed will be expensive and bring disruptions. We also understand the issues of residential displacement and an at-grade station vs aerial.

However, effectively leveraging Monroe Road as an economic engine for our community demands a significant Silver Line presence along the road itself. Both 1B and 1C would bypass a key stretch of Monroe Road, passing through areas where no similar economic development potential appears likely. We also are concerned about the likely negative impacts of 1B on McAlpine Creek Park – a valued environmental and recreational asset.

At this point, we are unclear on whether the LPA or Option 1A offers the better transition course. In the September 24 Virtual Public Meeting, your staff was vague about the details of potential impacts. We definitely need more complete information about the implications of those alternatives before deciding which is preferable. For example, there is significant naturally occurring affordable housing along the LPA. If plans were in place to ensure continued, robust, affordable housing for those most in need (including households at 50% AMI and below), then concerns about residential relocation along the LPA might be significantly mitigated. Ensuring a stable source of affordable and workforce housing along the Silver Line is one.

To continue the Silver Line beyond McAlpine Creek, we unequivocally favor the LPA along Monroe Road until the approach into Matthews. This creates opportunities for a continuous stretch of transit-oriented development that also benefits from being on a major arterial roadway for well over one mile. Shifting to the CSX corridor might create limited TOD opportunities, but those developments would not have direct auto access to Monroe Road. Also, during the September 24 Virtual Public Meeting, the CATS staff acknowledged that the below-grade CSX alignment presents access challenges and that forging a right-of-way agreement with CSX could considerably increase this project's complexity.

Final Observations

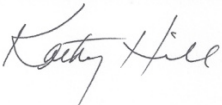
As MoRA representatives and others monitored the Virtual Public Meetings, numerous requests for details or clarification emerged. CATS representatives said those details could only be provided after further study. We had hoped that, based on information learned from the two Blue Line projects, we would have been offered perhaps a 'cheapest to most expensive' indication for the options -- or a rough cost of track installation per mile, or property acquisition costs based on tax assessed values.

Our observations in this letter would have benefitted from that deeper degree of detail. The Silver Line will be a transformative project for both MoRA and the City as a whole. We encourage CATS to analyze all options as thoroughly as possible and continue to engage in discussions with stakeholders along the Silver Line corridor before finalizing its route.

Mr. John Lewis
Page 3

We very much appreciate what CATS has done to reach this level of detail in Silver Line planning. We hope that MoRA's views will be considered and further sought out in developing the final plan for public approval of the Silver Line. Representatives of MoRA will be happy to discuss our views in greater detail with you and your staff – we believe numerous key questions need to be answered before a final alignment is presented to the Metropolitan Transit Commission.

Sincerely,



Kathy Hill
Board Chair
kathy@moract.org

CC : Ajonelle Poole (CATS) – LYNXSilverLine@publicinput.com
Mayor Vi Lyles – mayor@charlottenc.gov
Mayor Pro Tem Julie Eiselt – Julie.Eiselt@charlottenc.gov
Council Member Matt Newton – Matt.Newton@charlottenc.gov
Jason Lawrence (CATS) – JLawrence@ci.charlotte.nc.us