

## Durham's 'bicycle boulevard' plan could lure jobs to the Triangle, officials say



*Durham's neighborhood boulevard plan is a \$645,000 project, with 80 percent of the capital coming from a federal grant pool designed to alleviate congestion.*

By Lauren Ohnesorge – Senior Staff Writer, Triangle Business Journal - Feb 19, 2019

A neighborhood bike plan could do more than get Bull City residents out of their cars and onto bicycles – it could be yet another tool for economic developers working to bring more jobs to the Triangle.

That's according to those eyeing the proposal, where the Durham Transportation Department hopes to create a network of "low-stress streets to help people use bicycles more easily and to safely access destinations in the Bull City."

Dale McKeel, bicycle and pedestrian coordinator with DTD, explains that it's a way to make bicycling more approachable in Bull City.

“A lot of times, especially when you’re first thinking about bicycling, your first thought is to bicycle the same way that you would drive to a destination, and the roads that you would drive on are often not the ones that would be more comfortable for bicycling,” he says. “One street over from that busy road, there might be a parallel road that would be much more comfortable to ride.”

The city has proposed neighborhood bicycle routes, also known as “bicycle boulevard,” that will use signage and pavement markings to show bicyclists where to go – to better connect riders to existing trails, bicycle routes and other destinations. The first phase being proposed would designate about 7 miles of roads as “neighborhood bicycle routes.” All routes being prioritized are within a 1.5-mile radius of downtown Durham and, according to the city, will offer “the best opportunity to build out a network over time, starting at the center of the city.”

And other areas have led the way when it comes to these kinds of projects.

In 2017, for example, a coalition from the Triangle business community toured Richmond, Virginia, to see some of its transportation initiatives in action – and bicycle boulevards were one of the ideas they saw playing out.

“They are a way of leveraging existing street infrastructure to increase use and awareness of bicycles as an increasingly viable option for more and more people,” said Joe Milazzo, executive director of the Regional Transportation Alliance, which sponsored the Richmond tour.

Milazzo is among those seeing the potential for economic development benefits from plans like this one.

“Given the constant battle for talent – both those we are looking to attract from other areas, and those we are looking to retain here – bicycle boulevards can be a critical component in the quality of life we are always looking to enhance and market, whether people use them for commuting or other travel, “ he says.

John Boyd, a site selection expert based in New Jersey, says pedestrian and bicycle accessibility “is the new darling of the urban planning community and has significant economic development implications – especially for high-tech and corporate office projects.”

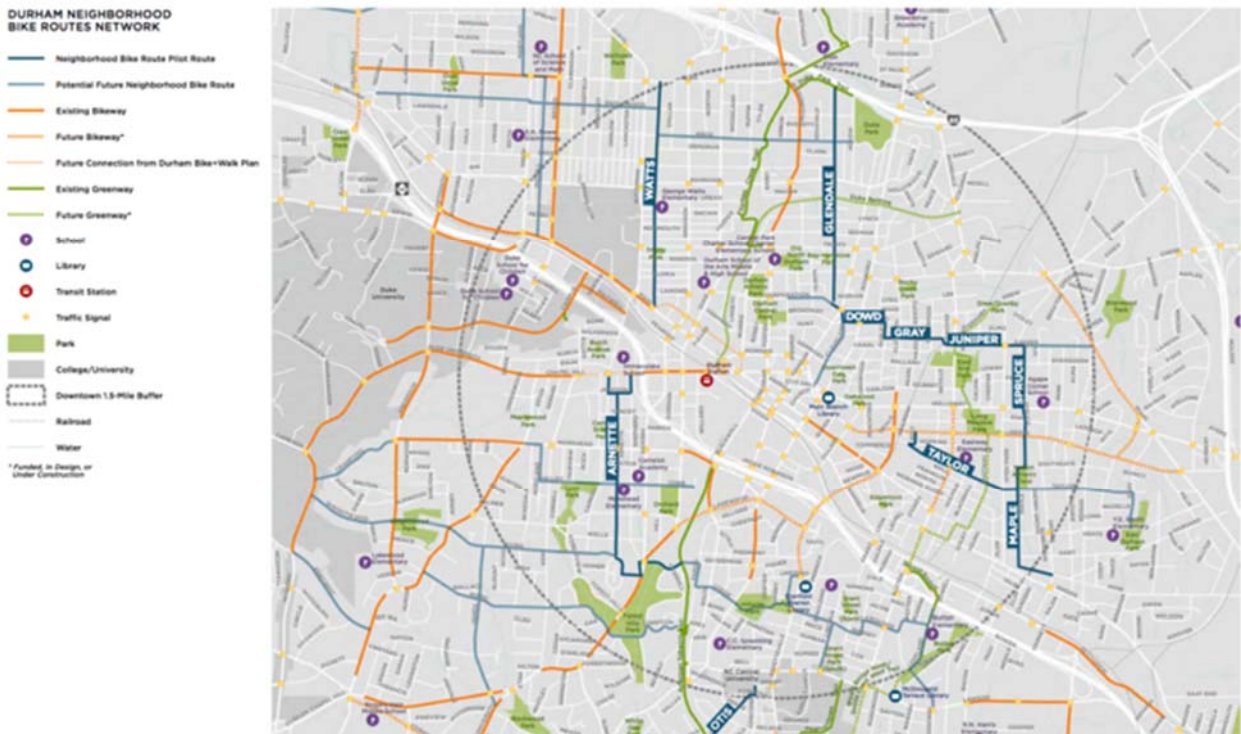
Boyd says polling data consistently shows millennials prefer to live and work in areas that provide these types of recreational amenities, pointing to Atlanta's BeltLine project, which spans 22 miles around the city's core, as an example.

“I'm sure that project will be a hallmark for corporate recruiting visits and familiarization tours in Atlanta in the months and years ahead,” he says, noting talent drives decisions for projects in IT,

health care and banking. "Developers are wise to create environments that attract and retain talent."

As for Durham's plan, the city is asking its residents for feedback.

Durham's neighborhood boulevard plan is a \$645,000 project, with 80 percent of the capital coming from a federal grant pool designed to alleviate congestion. And \$126,000 of the budget comes from city coffers.



A map included in Durham's bicycle boulevard proposal.

### Proposed routes for signage

- Arnette Avenue/Jackson Street/Buchanan Avenue/Shepherd Street to connect West Chapel Hill Street and Hermitage Court
- West Corporation Street/Cleveland Street/Dowd Street/Gurley Street/Gray Avenue/Hanover Street/Juniper Street to connect Glendale Avenue and Spruce Street
- Hermitage Court/Hermitage Court Drive/East Forest Hills Boulevard/West Enterprise Street to connect Arnette Avenue and the American Tobacco Trail
- Glendale Avenue to connect the Duke Park Connector Trail and West Corporation Street
- Otis Street/Formosa Avenue/Concord Street to connect the American Tobacco Trail and North Carolina Central University at Fayetteville Street
- Spruce Street/Southgate Street/Maple Street/Ashe Street to connect Juniper Street and Driver Street

- Belt Street/Taylor Street to connect Liberty Street and Maple Street
- Watts Street to connect Main Street and West Club Boulevard