



Institute for Transportation Research and Education
North Carolina State University

April 26, 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Lisa Gullette, ITRE Communications Manager
(919) 515-8039; lisa_gullette@ncsu.edu

Transportation Founders Fund Speech Recommends Seeking Public Opinion to Reach Transit Goals

Raleigh, N.C. – Alleviating traffic congestion around the Triangle area may be easier to fund than transportation planners perceive, according to Dennis Rash, Executive-in-Residence with the Center for Transportation Policy Studies at UNC-Charlotte.

Rash served as the keynote speaker at the Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) afternoon seminar for transportation engineering students at N.C. State and at the annual dinner for TFF members on April 19, events that connect transportation students and professionals in North Carolina, and supports N.C. State University (NCSU) programs. The TFF is an outreach activity of the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) and the Department of Civil Engineering at NCSU.

Rash's speech was titled, "Funding Transit: Mecklenburg County Gets it Done!" He discussed the advantages of a light rail system in Charlotte, as well as where the funds will come from to implement the system. He discussed how the methodology used to obtain these funds may work in other metropolitan areas, such as the Research Triangle Area.

During Rash's speech, he described how public attitude concerning the need for public transit was explored through public surveys before a tax referendum was put before the citizens for a vote. The private research showed that the public was in favor of spending public dollars on transportation alternatives to reduce congestion and slow overdevelopment and consumption of open land space. Public awareness marketing was also used before the voters were asked to make a decision about a tax increase. The residents of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina voted in favor of the one-half cent sales tax increase in November of 1998.

Currently, Mecklenburg County development is using up to 41 acres of open land per day. If residents of the suburbs utilize alternative transportation, such as a light rail system, this rate will decrease rapidly. "We need to do more convergence of transportation planning and land use planning," Rash said. As a result, it would spawn

Nagui M. Roupail,
Ph.D, Director

An inter-
institutional
center
serving all
16 UNC
campuses.

developers to increase development along rail stations instead of creating urban sprawl. In addition to heavy traffic congestion and urban sprawl, Charlotte has one of the worst air quality ratings in the nation.

The tax increase for the new transit system has currently funded a trolley which runs from the historic South End to Center City Charlotte. Originally, transportation planners in the City of Charlotte saw a need for a more complex trolley system, but during the 1990s, an influx of workers in Charlotte moved out to the suburbs where the cost of living is lower, making light rail a more sensible alternative. They hope to put this in place by the year 2025.

Mr. Rash had recommendations for the transportation professionals and civil engineering students and faculty. He strongly encouraged the civil engineering curriculum to include real estate development course work, to bring together land use planners, developers, and transportation planners in hopes of creating sustainable development, a retention of open space, and lower pollution values, while at the same time creating an appealing living and working environment for the community and a positive economic outlook for the region. He concluded the seminar stating the importance of the value of market research and public awareness advertising prior to a tax referendum, in conjunction with a land use policy to find a successful solution to some of the economic, development and transportation problems that Wake County also faces.

Rash is a Visiting Professor at UNC-Charlotte, and in the past, served as Dean of Students for eight years. He has been admitted to the North Carolina Bar and the Bar of the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Judicial Circuit, and was in private practice for five years. He is a graduate of the University of Virginia School of Law and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Transportation Founders Fund is an outreach activity of the Institute for Transportation Research and Education and the Department of Civil Engineering with a mission to enrich the transportation education and research programs at North Carolina State University, while at the same time providing a stimulating and provocative opportunity for transportation executives to interact with national transportation leaders.

ITRE, administered by NCSU, is a non-profit organization that conducts research, education, and technical assistance projects on a wide variety of surface transportation issues with the goals of solving problems and creating new products, better services and smarter workers. ITRE is located on NCSU's Centennial Campus. For more information about ITRE, TFF and related programs, please visit our Web site at www.itre.ncsu.edu

-kmt-