



THIS WEEK'S SPEAKER

March 16, 2021

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John Lewis, CEO, Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS)

By Jim Kelley

Elly Clary introduced John Lewis, the CEO of the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS). John arrived to Charlotte in September, 2015 and has taken CATS into a new era of transit in Charlotte with the opening of the 9+ mile LYNX Blue Line light rail extension and launching the bus system redesign initiative, Envision My Ride.

John previously served as the CEO of the Central Florida Regional Transit Authority. He previously held several leadership positions as the CEO of the Greater Richmond Transit Company and the Director of Operations and Director of Bus Operations with the Maryland Transit Administration.

COVID has definitely affected CATS. They had to cut service by 50% but they have also made adjustments to focus on customer needs. Where they previously had express bus service from suburban areas like Pineville, Huntersville, Gaston County and Union County, now they have doubled the use of lines that focus on hospital staff, service workers and first responders. They now have 50% capacity limits in their vehicles.

In August, 2020, they began giving out free masks at their transit stations, their transfer stations and their light rail stations. Currently, CATS is connecting the community to healthcare services and their light rail cars and buses are still serving 40,000 to 50,000 a day.

John said CATS is currently focusing on the 2030 Transit Corridor Plan. Four areas of the plan are currently **operating** – the LYNX Blue Line Light Rail, the Sprinter Airport Enhanced Bus, The Metro Rapid BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) and

the City LYNX Gold Line Phase 1. One area is under **construction and testing** – City LYNX Gold Line Phase 2. Two areas are **under development** – the Charlotte Gateway Station and the LYNX Silver Line Light Rail which also includes studies of Rail Trails and a transit-oriented development study. Three areas are **upcoming and under study** – the Metro Rapid BRT Improvement Study, The Bus Priority Study called Envision My Ride and the City LYNX Gold Line Phase 3.

The Blue Line opened in 2007 and has already resulted in over \$3 billion in development. The Blue Line extension opened in 2018 already has over \$1.2 billion in actual development or planned development.

The Silver Line will be a 26-mile light rail line that will stretch from the town of Matthews and Union County through Center City in to Belmont. The Red Line will connect the towns of Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville with Center City. Funding is still needed for the Silver Line and Red Line.

The Charlotte Gateway Station is under development. This station will be approximately 12 acres and will include a multimodal transportation hub at Graham Street and West Trade Street across from the Charlotte Knights stadium and will include Amtrak, Greyhound, CATS bus service, LYNX Silver Line and City LYNX Gold Line.

Envision My Ride is an initiative to redesign the current bus system and will focus on more frequent bus service, more direct bus service and more crosstown and suburb to suburb connections. The result will be 90-minute waits versus 15-minute waits.

A question was asked about future sales tax possibilities to fund some of these plans. A one-half cent sales tax was approved in 2002 to fund the 2030 plan. However, during the four years of the recession the city lost \$3 billion dollars to fund the plan so we need an infusion of funds to complete the plan by 2030. An additional one cent sales tax is being considered but it has to be approved by the state general assembly and then be voted on in Mecklenburg County as a ballot initiative. If we don't receive those additional funds, the 2030 plan may become a 2050 plan.

*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/524466613>

Mr. Lewis' introduction begins at the 12:55 minute mark.