

**Chapel Hill, NC** - BY ROB SHAPARD, The Herald-Sun

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As the town of Chapel Hill resumes its search for a spot along the U.S. 15-501 corridor for a park-and-ride lot, it will have a sizable chunk of federal money in hand to help with the project.

An allocation of \$1.25 million for the town was included in the federal transportation budget approved by Congress in late July, written into the bill by U.S. Rep. David Price, D-Orange.

"We're excited," said Kurt Neufang, interim director of the town department that operates Chapel Hill Transit.

"Those folks traveling in from Durham, or who exit there to get to U.S. 15-501, know first-hand the type of congestion that [they] face trying to get into town from that direction," he said.

The federal funds likely won't be enough to buy property, design a lot and actually build it, Town Manager Cal Horton said Wednesday. And he said the town and its partners in Chapel Hill Transit -- UNC Chapel Hill and Carrboro -- would have to provide matching funds for the federal money that could total about \$250,000.

But the \$1.25 million is a major jump-start, Horton said.

"We need the facility now, [but] it will take several years to make this come to fruition," he said. "The critical part is to get enough cash to get started, and we've got that now."

The transit partners have built other park-and-ride lots now served by the bus system, such as those on Eubanks Road and near Jones Ferry Road and Southern Village.

But a similar lot for the U.S. 15-501 corridor has remained on the wish list for several years, and the interest has grown along with the escalating traffic volume along that major connection between southern Orange County, Durham and Interstate 40.

The town currently doesn't have any parcels in mind to pursue for the future park-and-ride lot, Horton said. Planners will start that search anew.

The search could cover vacant parcels as well as those with a relatively low intensity of use, and the search could extend over the county line into Durham, Horton said.

He also noted the location wouldn't have to be directly adjacent to the highway, although it would need to be "reasonably accessible" for the commuters looking to use the lot.

He gave a rough cost estimate of \$10,000 to \$12,000 per parking space for building such a lot, but that could change depending on the layout of the site. The town doesn't have a target date at this point.

"Our experience in this is that you can't set a timeline," the manager said. "The hard part is to reach agreement with the person who owns the property."