

Aaron Keck Reporting

CHAPEL HILL - Earlier this month, Durham County voters approved a half-cent sales tax increase to fund regional transit programs—increasing excitement among local leaders about the prospects of a light-rail transit system in the Triangle.

And on the state level, plans are being made for a high-speed rail system that could revitalize travel between the Triangle and Charlotte.

"We're going to upgrade the Raleigh-to-Charlotte high-speed rail," says Congressman David Price. "We're going to get it up to 2.25 hours...we're going to build a station in Hillsborough, and we're going to build good stations in Raleigh and Charlotte, at either end of the line. All that's in the works."

Price made those comments Monday at a legislative briefing hosted by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce at the Carolina Club. Hillsborough Mayor Tom Stevens was among 70 local business leaders in attendance.

Opponents of an expanded rail system say it wouldn't be used by enough people to justify the expense, but Price says he doesn't think that's the case—and beyond that, he sees high-speed rail as a long-term economic investment as well.

"It's very promising," he said Monday. "It's an economic engine for us. It's going to be the best way by far to travel from this area to Charlotte, and lots of people will use it."

Closer to home, local officials say if Orange and Wake Counties follow Durham's lead on the transit tax, a local light-rail system could be up and running by 2025.