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Legislative Study Commission on Urban Growth and Infrastructure Issues

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Thank you, Madam Chairman, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Karen Rindge, and I am the Executive Director of WakeUP Wake County. We thank the General Assembly for your leadership in addressing critical growth issues in North Carolina.

WakeUP Wake County is a nonpartisan group of citizens concerned about growth and the future of Wake County and the Triangle region. We are voters, business people, educators, homemakers, grandparents, volunteers, and more who want to ensure that Wake County is healthy and competitive in the long run. We formed four years ago to be a voice for taxpayers who believe we need to plan well for population growth and that development should help pay its fair share for the costs of infrastructure needed for our continued growth.

The world's population is projected to swell by three more billion people. North Carolina alone is projected to add **4,000,000** people in the next 20 years. The Raleigh-Cary metropolitan region was the fastest growing in the nation last year. Wake County is on path to become the largest county, surpassing Mecklenburg, with our population due to double to 1.4 million by 2030 from 750,000 in just 2005.

A **2007 Rockefeller Foundation** report, "Century of the City: No Time to Lose," recommends investments for a prosperous economy, quality environment and social equity, which focus on regionalism, climate change, multimodal transportation, natural resource conservation, and equity in access to housing and education. Specific challenges identified for the U.S. Piedmont-Atlantic region were traffic congestion, runaway land consumption from sprawling development, and inadequate water and sewer infrastructure without impacts fees to pay for costs.

The Triangle Reality Check, an initiative of Triangle Tomorrow and the Urban Land Institute, last year brought together 300 Triangle civic leaders to examine how to plan for population, housing and job growth in the Triangle. They reached three conclusions for quality growth planning:

1. Build regional transit
2. Create vibrant, urban centers of development
3. Protect dwindling open space and water resources

Also, the 2009 forum of North Carolina State University's esteemed **Institute for Emerging Issues** focused on growth, and the state and national experts identified the very same challenges as does WakeUP Wake County: sustainably meeting infrastructure needs for transportation, water supply, public schools and housing, all combined with good land use planning.

These challenges are exactly why WakeUP Wake County bubbled up from local people concerned about Wake's growth trends: growth of 100 people per day, development of up to 35 acres of land daily, an exploding school system with dwindling funding, roads projected to be beyond capacity, air quality problems, and potential shortage of drinking water. WakeUP is also concerned about how we will meet a projected \$18 billion infrastructure shortfall by 2030, according to the Blue Ribbon Committee on the Future of Wake County. We need to wake up because if we do not, our quality of life, economic and environmental well-being will be gravely at risk. And those most economically at risk will face even greater burden.

WakeUP's mission is public education and engaging citizens on local growth issues of transit, land use, water and schools. We do this through holding public forums, online and media communications, speaking at public hearings, building coalitions, meeting with civic leaders and proposing good growth solutions. Our community-based organization could perhaps be a model for other regions of the state.

While WakeUP's focus is on local and municipal issues, we keep an eye to state and federal policy. Our recommendations for state action include:

1. **Fund Transit.** Put money in the Intermodal Fund the legislature wisely established last year. Continue support for high speed rail. Building a Triangle region multi-modal public transit system is one of WakeUP's top priorities because transit is one of the best ways to guide growth and create vibrant development around rail lines. Transit brings economic development (witness Charlotte), jobs, walkable communities, cheaper and cleaner transportation options.
2. **Encourage Water Conservation.** The UNC and Duke researchers of the North Carolina Water Allocation Study tell us the Triangle region will likely be the first area on the East Coast to run out of water, save Atlanta. Demand for water in Raleigh and Eastern Wake will exceed supply by 2040, according to projections. Please pass the Water Resources Policy Act, which would assess our statewide water needs and determine how water will need to be shared. North Carolina should update building codes to improve water efficiency and encourage rainwater capture for local water use.
3. **Support Better Water Quality.** Approve strong rules on stormwater runoff to clean up Falls Lake, which will be the standard for other drinking water reservoirs. North Carolina also needs rules to improve failing septic tanks, a major problem for water quality. State funding for water and sewer systems should be made available to cities as well as rural areas.
4. **Fund Schools through a Statewide Real Estate Transfer Tax.** Wake County's school population grows by thousands each year, and you well know the seriousness of education budget cuts. If growth is demanding greater education resources, let growth help pay for the infrastructure costs, as other states have. Authorize local municipalities to use impact fees and Adequate Public Facilities Ordinances to pay for infrastructure.
5. **Enable Inclusionary Zoning.** Allow municipalities to institute inclusionary zoning to ensure that more affordable housing choices exist throughout cities and suburbs. This will help diversify our schools and reduce transportation costs for low-income people.

6. **Protect Land.** Continue funding land conservation through the existing Clean Water Management, Natural Heritage, Parks and Recreation and Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Funds.

WakeUP believes that the end game is human, environmental and economic sustainability. Growth brings many good things, but we have to face and prepare for the challenges. We can no longer afford to make decisions for short term gain, but must make them for the well-being of future generations. And we must **plan** for them.

Again, thank you for inviting WakeUP Wake County to speak to you today.