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## ***City Beat – November 19, 2002***

An occasional series on issues, policies and practices of interest to N.C.'s cities

### **N.C.'s Seven "Urban Highway Loops"**

The urban highway loops were created and funded by the North Carolina General Assembly in the 1989 Highway Trust Fund legislation. The legislation created the state's Highway Trust Fund and provided funds by levying transportation related taxes (primarily a "use tax" on car sales and a portion of the gas tax). The legislation was very specific in how the funds will be used, focusing primarily on the construction of an intra-state highway system and seven "urban highway loops." In both regards the law specifies the general route for each intra-state highway and urban loop. The 1989 law also includes a provision that repeals, or "sunsets," the taxes that fund the Highway Trust Fund when the specific projects outlined in the legislation are completed.

Below is current information regarding each of the seven loop roads covered by the 1989 legislation. This information was gathered from various sources and is intended to give a general sense of the status of the state's urban loop program.

#### **Asheville**

The Asheville loop is actually the construction of a 3½-mile arc combined with substantial improvements to existing highways. It has a \$300 million total cost estimate.

#### ***Status***

There has been no construction to date – the project is still in the planning and environmental studies phase. No right-of-way has been purchased yet. NC DOT expects to start construction in 2008.

#### ***Funding***

Of the total cost of \$300 million, the project has \$170 million on the current Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and \$130m not yet funded because it is past current TIP (after 2010).

### ***Commentary (Asheville cont.)***

Community impact issues have delayed the route selection and may cause further delays. The city and NC DOT are working cooperatively to address the community concerns.

### **Charlotte**

The Charlotte loop is a 65-mile circle around the city. It has a total estimated cost of \$1.2 billion.

#### ***Status***

Large segments of the Charlotte loop are already open and, in 2004, 45 miles of the 65-mile loop will be in operation. By 2007 an additional 13 miles will be open and the remaining 7 miles will be under contract.

#### ***Funding***

Funding to complete the Charlotte loop is in the current TIP, including some funding to widen to 6-lanes some of the 4-lane portions of the loop that already experience traffic congestion.

#### ***Commentary***

The Charlotte loop is the most advanced of the state's loop projects. NC DOT does not anticipate any major issues that would delay the loop. Local debate over related land use and the number of interchanges has not impeded the construction.

### **Winston-Salem**

The Winston-Salem loop is a 30-mile arc across the northern portion of the county. It has a \$670 million total estimated cost.

#### ***Status***

There has been no construction of the Winston-Salem loop because it is under federal court injunction. The court injunction is the result of a suit filed by the "Friends of Forsyth." The injunction requires that the environmental studies include the full project rather than being broken into portions of the loop. As a result of the injunction the environmental studies are being redone and construction is anticipated to start in 2007/8 timeframe.

#### ***Funding***

Approximately \$300 million of the \$670 million cost estimate are currently funded in the TIP. The remainder of funding is outside the TIP (post-2010).

#### ***Commentary***

The MPO and NC DOT are in accord on the project. The MPO may want to accelerate the eastern portion of the arc to relieve traffic pressure on critically congested US 52 (52 is not Trust Fund eligible).

## **Greensboro**

The Greensboro project is a 55-mile loop that circles the city. The estimated total cost to complete is \$1 billion.

### ***Status***

Two miles of the loop are open and 15 miles are expected to open next year. An additional 10 miles of construction are to start next year. The remaining 28 miles are expected to start construction in 2008/9 timeframe. NC DOT estimates the loop will be completed between 2012-2015.

### ***Funding***

The \$1 billion Greensboro loop is almost entirely funded with only \$50 million outside the current TIP.

### ***Commentary***

The Greensboro loop is well on its way to completion. After Charlotte, it is further along than the other loops. There are no major delays expected and the project is in “good shape.”

## **Raleigh**

The Raleigh Loop is a 70-mile circle around Raleigh and Cary. But, the current Highway Trust Fund loop program only covers a 43-mile arc around the northern half of the city. The total estimated cost of the full loop is \$850 million.

### ***Status***

Currently 17 miles of the loop are open. In 2003 an additional 23 miles will start construction. The remaining few miles eligible for the Highway Trust Fund urban loop program will start construction in 2008.

### ***Funding***

The total estimated cost of the 43 miles eligible for the urban loop program is \$450 million. Funding to complete this is fully covered by the current TIP. The remaining 27-mile portion of the circle around the area is estimated to cost \$400 million, but it is not eligible for funding under the current Highway Trust Fund law.

### ***Commentary***

The portion of the Raleigh loop that is covered by the Highway Trust Fund is proceeding along well. The southern portion of the loop was not covered or funded by the 1989 legislation that created the Highway Trust Fund. Consequently, there is no funding available in the foreseeable future to “complete” the loop. Some have suggested that a toll road be considered to finish the “southern leg” of the Raleigh loop.

## **Durham**

The Durham loop is in “limbo” at this time, therefore no funding estimate is available.

### ***Status (Durham cont.)***

The MPO has rejected the proposed route for the loop and is presently working with DOT to establish a new loop plan. The General Assembly passed legislation last year to allow the NC DOT and the MPO to establish a “new loop” for Durham.

### ***Funding***

Given that the Durham loop is gone back to square one, the \$70 million of funding in the current TIP may have to be reprogrammed to other purposes.

### ***Commentary***

The situation in Durham is precipitated by the community’s strong desire to avoid building a major highway that disturbs the Eno River State Park. Since the General Assembly’s action last year allows the local governments and NC DOT to “redraw” the Durham loop it is difficult to predict when and where the Durham project will get off the ground or how much it will cost.

## **Wilmington**

Wilmington’s loop is a 28-mile arc with an estimated cost of \$400 million.

### ***Status***

Currently there are seven miles of the arc under construction, which should be complete in 2005. Eight more miles are expected to start construction beginning next year and the remainder will start construction in 2009.

### ***Funding***

Funding to complete the Wilmington loop is fully covered by the current TIP.

### ***Commentary***

The Wilmington loop includes some important new bridges and the I-40 to US 421 section that is expected to open in 2005 will provide an important alternative route for through-traffic currently funneled onto congested surface streets in town.