



September 2013

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

It's been a long time since I've heard anything about the Southeast Extension project. Is the project still active?

Yes, the study for the Southeast Extension project for the completion of the 540 Outer Loop, also known as the Complete 540 project, is still active. The project is now progressing after a more than two-year delay resulting from certain intergovernmental issues and coordination with environmental resource and regulatory agencies.

What were the issues that delayed the study?

In very general terms, the issues involved a conflict between certain federal requirements that must be met over the course of an environmental study and a state law that was passed by the NC General Assembly in 2011 (NC Session Law 2011-7). This law limited NCDOT's ability to comply with those federal regulations.

I've heard these issues had something to do with the project's Red Corridor. Where did the Red Corridor come from and why did it cause such a problem?

Projects such as the Complete 540 (Triangle Expressway Southeast Extension) must comply with a variety of federal laws. One of these is the Clean Water Act, which is administered jointly by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). This law requires USACE and USEPA to review projects to ensure that reasonable measures are taken to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any harm to wetlands, streams, and floodplains that the project might cause.

In earlier reviews of potential routes being studied for this project, representatives from these agencies informed NCDOT that an additional route location needed to be studied in the northern portion of the study area, north of Lake Benson, because it would provide a shorter option that might be able to minimize some environmental impacts. In response, NCDOT developed the Red Corridor, a potential route crossing the southern part of the Town of Garner. In addition to providing a shorter option that could reduce impacts to wetlands, the Red Corridor also has the advantage of avoiding habitat for the federally protected Dwarf Wedgemussel.

While the Red Corridor offered these natural resource advantages, NCDOT understood that it would have unavoidable and severe impacts to many communities in Garner. NCDOT recommended eliminating this option from consideration, but the resource and regulatory agencies did not agree with this recommendation. In an attempt to ensure that the Red Corridor would not become the final choice for the project, the NC General Assembly enacted NC Session Law 2011-7. This law prohibited NCDOT from implementing any route located north of the route designated as the Orange Corridor, which is a route that was protected from development in the 1990s.

In response to that legislation, NCDOT worked extensively with environmental agencies and local stakeholders to find a way to move the study forward without the Red Corridor. During that effort, USACE determined that the federal laws they administer require the Red Corridor to be studied at the same level of detail as the other route locations, and that the state law enacted in 2011 does not supersede federal law. As a result of this conflict between state and federal law, the project could not move forward.

How were these intergovernmental issues resolved?

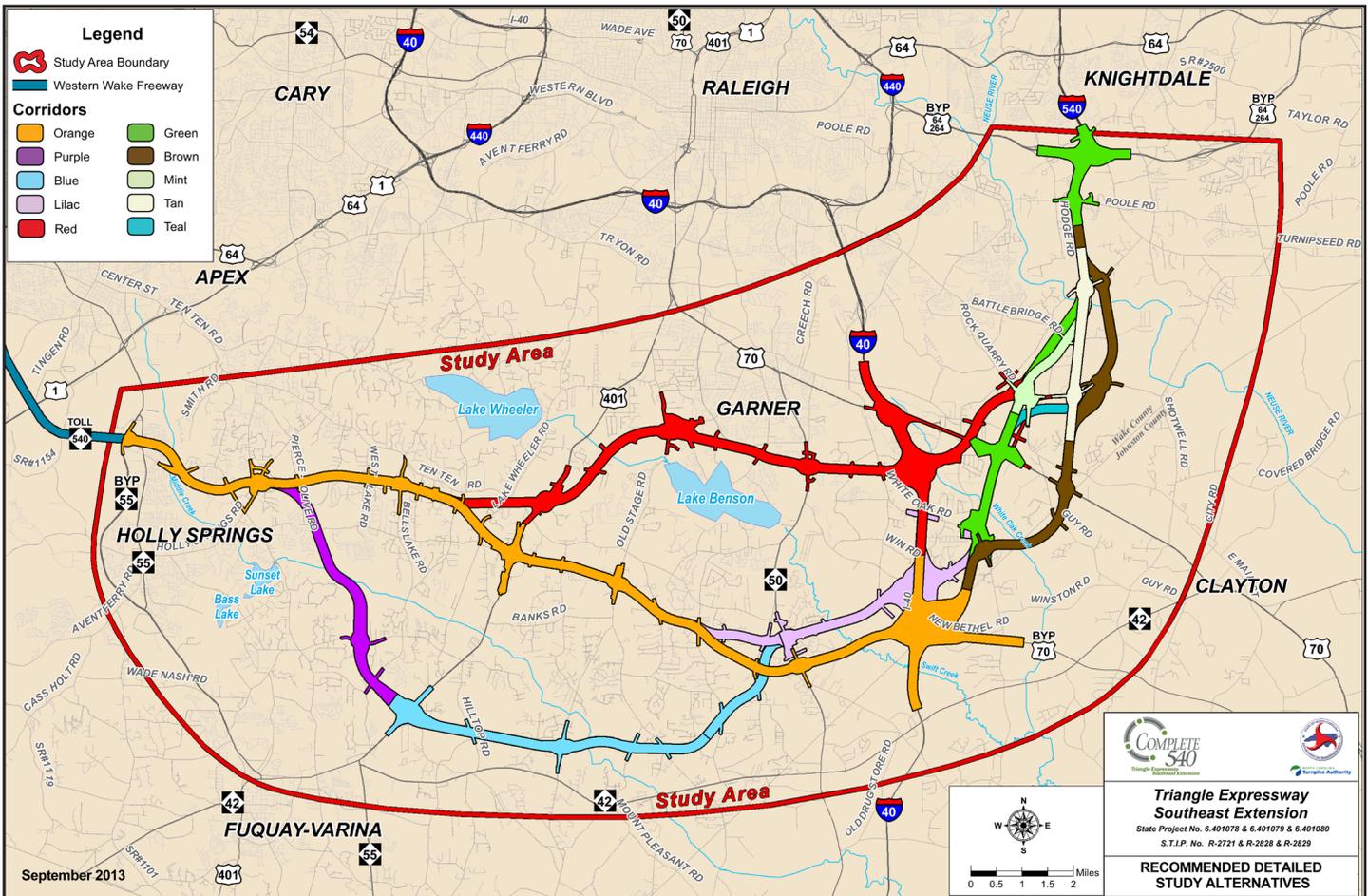
Once it became apparent that NC Session Law 2011-7 was preventing the project study from moving forward, the NC General Assembly reconsidered the law and enacted legislation in June 2013 to repeal it, removing the Red Corridor restrictions. As part of this repeal, NCDOT was instructed by the General Assembly to work as quickly as possible to determine the final route location for the project and to complete the required environmental studies. With the restrictions now lifted, NCDOT has resumed work on the project.

During the time the Red Corridor restrictions were in place, was any work done on other parts of the study?

Yes, NCDOT worked with the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) and other local and agency stakeholders to see if they could identify any other route locations that could minimize wetland impacts similar to the Red Corridor. A new corridor – designated as the Lilac Corridor – showed the potential to accommodate this. Therefore, the Lilac Corridor is being considered for more detailed study.

Now that the study restrictions have been lifted, what are the current route location alternatives that are being studied?

There are several different roadway segments being studied. Each segment can be combined with other segments to make a continuous route from the beginning of the overall project, at NC 55 Bypass in Apex, to the end of the project, at US 64/US 264 in Knightdale. There are currently ten different colored segments being recommended for further consideration. When combined in various possible ways, they result in seventeen alternative route locations from Apex to Knightdale and can be seen on the map below.



What other route locations are being combined with the new Lilac Corridor?

Earlier in the study, two route locations were drawn in the southern portion of the study area. Their color designations were Blue and Purple. At that time, those two segments did not seem to provide enough benefit over

other options to warrant additional study. With the development of the Lilac Corridor, however, it was found that connecting the Purple Corridor to the Blue Corridor, and then to the Lilac Corridor, created an option that minimizes wetland impacts similar to the Red Corridor. For this reason, the combination known as the Purple-Blue-Lilac Corridor is under consideration for more detailed study.

It is also possible to connect the Lilac Corridor with the previously developed Orange Corridor. This combination also results in a potential route location with a balance of benefits and impacts comparable to others under consideration. As a result, it is also being considered for more detailed study.

I was under the impression that the Purple and Blue Corridors had been permanently dismissed. Why are they still being studied?

In general, studies such as the one being conducted for the Complete 540 project start with a very general level of analysis, with many different potential routes under consideration. As the impacts and benefits of each become clearer, some are set aside and others looked at more closely. Sometimes, however, new information becomes available that changes earlier decisions. When this happens, it can become necessary to take a second look at older routes. With the development of the Lilac Corridor, a potential route connecting the Purple Corridor to the Blue Corridor to the Lilac Corridor was found to minimize wetland impacts to a similar degree as the Red Corridor.

We always try to make it clear to everyone that no decision is final until the study is completed and accepted by the Federal Highway Administration. We cannot emphasize this enough.

Is all of the former Blue Corridor being studied?

NCDOT is not recommending that the original Blue Corridor be considered for more detailed study. The original Blue Corridor, as presented to the public in September 2010, extended from an area near Sunset Lake Road in Holly Springs southward to James Slaughter Road in Fuquay-Varina, then extended eastward to NC 50. The original Purple Corridor connected to the Blue Corridor near Johnson Pond Road in Fuquay-Varina. The western portion of the original Blue Corridor, from Sunset Lake Road to Johnson Pond Road in the Holly Springs/Fuquay-Varina area, is not recommended to be part of the detailed study routes. Only the portion of the Blue Corridor between Johnson Pond Road and NC 50, connecting the Purple Corridor to the Lilac Corridor, is recommended for more detailed study.

Is the Red Corridor the only option that avoids Dwarf Wedgemussel habitat?

Currently, the Red Corridor is the only potential route under consideration that avoids the habitat for this federally protected species. However, this does not mean that NCDOT must select this route. NCDOT must fully document the potential effects of each of the potential routes under consideration on the Dwarf Wedgemussel and will then work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine how the effects of each potential route could be minimized and/or mitigated.

How can I provide my input on the potential routes now under consideration?

During the fall of 2013, we will hold public and agency meetings to solicit input on the project, particularly about the potential routes under consideration. We will use this input to work with the environmental agencies to finalize the set of potential routes for detailed study, and then we can begin analyzing in detail their benefits and impacts. We will document the results of those analyses in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

I provided input on the project and its potential routes back in 2010. Do I need to re-submit my comments?

We will consider all the comments and input provided to date on the project and its potential routes. This will include comments and input provided at and following the public meetings held in September 2010. We continue to welcome public input, but previous comments do not need to be resubmitted to ensure that they will be considered.

What are the next steps in the study and when will it officially be complete?

Once the draft version of the EIS (Draft EIS) is completed and approved by FHWA, the official review period will begin. During the review period, all who have a stake in the project, including local, state, and federal officials and

the general public, will be given ample time to read, understand, and comment on the material contained in the Draft EIS and its recommendations.

A public hearing will be held during this review period to allow all who are interested in the project to:

- Review documents, maps, and other information regarding the project and its technical documents;
- Discuss the study and its recommendations with the NCDOT staff;
- Ask questions about any of the materials on display or the study in general; and
- Make statements for the official project record about the project and its recommendations.

Following the review period, we will address all substantive comments and use this feedback to identify the route that best balances impacts on the natural and physical environments and on the community. We will recommend this route as the Preferred Alternative for the project, and document this recommendation in a Final EIS. In this document, we will summarize and respond to all substantive comments. If no significant changes to the proposed project are required as a result of the review of the Final EIS, FHWA will approve it and publish a “Record of Decision” (ROD) officially announcing the results of the study. At that point, the environmental study is considered complete.

The anticipated schedule for the key steps that remain is as follows:

KEY STEP	TARGET DATE
Hold Public Workshops on Alternatives	Fall 2013
Finalize Detailed Study Alternatives	Winter 2013
Complete Required Technical Studies	Fall 2014
Receive Approval of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement	Spring 2015
Draft EIS Review Period and Hold Public Hearing	Summer 2015
Selection of the Preferred Alternative.....	Fall 2015
Approval of Final Environmental Impact Statement	Spring 2016
Publication of the Record of Decision	Summer 2016
Complete Financial Feasibility	Spring 2017
Begin Right of Way Acquisition	Summer 2017*
Begin Construction	Spring 2018*
Open to Traffic	Spring 2022*

*Subject to change, based on the availability of project funding.

Why does the environmental study take so long to complete?

To be eligible for federal funding and receive federal permits to construct the project, NCDOT must fully evaluate and document the potential environmental impacts of the routes included in the detailed study. To complete these evaluations, NCDOT must develop preliminary engineering designs for each of the potential routes to determine the location and extent of various types of impacts. These include air quality, noise, homes and businesses, historic and archaeological resources, and natural resources. NCDOT must then fully document these findings in various technical reports, which are summarized in a Draft EIS. During this process, NCDOT must engage the agencies and the public to ensure that the data developed and conclusions drawn are accurate, so that we can identify the route that best balances impacts on all of these features.

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