

# FAQs

## Frequently Asked Questions

June 2009

To date, the North Carolina Turnpike Authority has heard from many interested citizens prior to, and as part of, the public review process for the Gaston East-West Connector (Garden Parkway) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS). Brief answers to some of the most frequently asked questions are provided below.

If you have other questions or would like additional information, please email the project team at [gaston@ncturnpike.org](mailto:gaston@ncturnpike.org) or call the project hotline at 1-800-475-6402.

### PROJECT HISTORY AND STUDIES

#### *How did the project originate?*

Projects begin at the local level. In the 1990s, the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization led an effort to develop a corridor for the Garden Parkway to include on their Thoroughfare Plan. Local officials propose roadway projects from the Thoroughfare Plan to be included on the local Long Range Transportation Plan. Local officials set priorities for projects and work with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to include projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to receive state and/or federal funds. This project continues to be one of the highest priority projects for this region.

#### *What is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) and what does it mean?*

It is a document based on federal law – the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The NEPA requires federal agencies to consider the potential environmental consequences of their proposal, document their analyses, and make this information available to the public for comment prior to project implementation.

#### *What does the Draft EIS for the Garden Parkway include?*

The Draft EIS addresses the following questions: why is a project needed; what are the reasonable alternatives for the project; what are the impacts, both positive and negative, of the 12 Detailed Study Alternatives; and what can be done to mitigate impacts. It also summarizes public and agency coordination.

### SCHEDULE AND PHASING

#### *Is the project going to end at US 321?*

No. The project limits are from I-485 on the east end to I-85 on the west end. However, construction of large transportation projects such as the Garden Parkway, I-485 in Charlotte, I-540 in Raleigh, etc., are typically constructed in phases as funding becomes available. Construction phases are determined after the environmental planning phase is completed based on availability of funding. Construction of individual phases or segments must have endpoints at an interchange or intersection with another road. The segment from I-485 to US 321 is a likely first phase for the project, but this will depend on funding available at the time the project is ready to be constructed.

The intent is to build the ultimate project from I-485 to I-85 as soon as possible.

#### *The schedule says the project will be open to traffic in 2014. Which part will be open?*

The first phase of the project is expected to be open to traffic by 2014. This phase will start at I-485 and extend westward. The most likely western interim terminus is currently US 321, based on current construction prices and what is known about available funding. This may change as the project moves closer to the start of construction in 2011.

#### *Where is the project funding coming from?*

Funding to construct the project will be from multiple sources over the course of several years. The majority of this project will be funded through the sale of revenue bonds, which will be repaid with the tolls collected along this roadway. The project may also be funded in part by federal credit assistance from the United States Department of Transportation under the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act – or TIFIA -- program. STIP funds may be used. Appropriations from the NC Legislature (i.e. "Gap Funding" in the currently approved amount of \$35 million per year) are also anticipated.

#### *How long will it take to build the project?*

The first phase is expected to begin in early 2011 and be complete by the end of 2014, which is a total of four years. Other phases will begin when funding is available and the duration of construction will depend on the length and complexity of the segment being built.

#### *How will project construction proceed?*

The project is anticipated to be constructed through a Design-Build process. Design-Build is a contracting process where a contractor and designer are hired as a team to complete the design and construct the project under the guidance of the owner (in this case the state of North Carolina – the Turnpike Authority).

### TRAFFIC CONCERNS ALONG US 321

#### *If the project ends at US 321, how much traffic will be added to US 321 and will US 321 be able to handle this projected traffic?*

It should be noted that the project is being planned and studied from I-485 to I-85. During the period that the project may terminate at US 321, our studies indicate there will be an increase in traffic along US 321 from the Garden

Parkway north to Stagecoach Road for a distance of approximately three-fourths of a mile. Beyond Stagecoach Road, the traffic is estimated to generally be the same with or without the project.

Under both an interim phase for the Garden Parkway and the ultimate project, a corridor-level evaluation indicates US 321 would operate under capacity and at acceptable levels of service from Robinson Road (south of the Garden Parkway) to US 29/74 (Wilkinson Blvd) through the year 2030 (the latest year for which traffic forecasts were developed).

The analyses described above were developed using traffic forecasts for the years 2015 and 2030 based on the Metrolina Regional Travel Demand Model. Detailed traffic information is available on our website at <http://www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston/>

***Will the project send high volumes of trucks through the York Chester historic neighborhood located off US 321?***

No. Based on existing truck data and future predicted truck percentages, daily truck traffic along US 321 in the historic district is not expected to increase due to the Garden Parkway (whether it's an interim phase from I-485 to US 321 or the ultimate project from I-485 to I-85).

## EFFECTS OF THE PROJECT

***How can I find out if my property is impacted by the project?***

The Corridor/Design Public Hearing Maps show the preliminary engineering designs for the Detailed Study Alternatives (potential corridors for the road derived from a balance of all environmental and public concerns within the area in which the project is expected to go) overlaid on aerial photographs that also show parcel boundaries. In addition to the preliminary right-of-way limits for each Detailed Study Alternative, the Hearing Maps show the wide corridor boundaries where detailed information was collected in order to develop the preliminary right of way. The preliminary design right of way is subject to change as the project moves forward in the process. However, the right of way must stay within the corridor area or additional data collection and new studies would be required.

The Hearing Maps are available as pdfs from the project website at [www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston/deis.asp](http://www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston/deis.asp)

***Will the project have a negative impact on the region's air quality?***

The project area is part of the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill air quality region (also known as the Metrolina Region). Air quality regions are evaluated to determine if they are meeting National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for six pollutants: carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, lead, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide. An area that exceeds the NAAQS for a pollutant is said to be in "non-

attainment" for that pollutant. The Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill air quality region is a non-attainment area for ozone. The region prepares plans to evaluate how it is going to maintain or achieve attainment status for the NAAQS. For transportation sources, the region is evaluated as a whole through the region's long range transportation plans and transportation improvement programs. At this time, the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO's) Long Range Transportation Plan and the Mecklenburg Union MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan have been determined to be in conformity with the State's plans to comply with the NAAQS. The Gaston East-West Connector is included in these long range transportation plans designed to meet and maintain the NAAQS.

***What are some of the benefits of the project?***

With the Garden Parkway in place, travel times in 2030 are expected to be substantially shorter for many trips. Trips across southern Gaston County are expected to be almost 10 minutes shorter, and trips across the Catawba River are estimated to be 20-30 minutes shorter. In addition, the Garden Parkway would provide benefits to travelers who do not use it, as it would reduce overall congestion throughout Gaston County by 6-7 percent.

## ALTERNATIVES

***The Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) identified an alignment for the project several years ago. There were several public meetings about this before the MPO finalized their corridor. Was this corridor considered and studied by the Turnpike Authority?***

This corridor was considered and evaluated as part of the Preliminary Alternatives for the project. Several segments of the corridor are included as part of the Detailed Study Alternatives. In the Belmont area, the MPO corridor was eliminated from study due to recent facility improvements at the Allen Steam Station power plant that did not exist at the time the MPO made their recommendation. Duke Energy installed air pollution control equipment, costing approximately \$100 million dollars, just north of the power plant, directly in the path of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's proposed corridor.

***Did you consider widening I-85 as an option?***

Several options for widening or adding capacity to I-85 were considered as part of the alternatives development and evaluation process, but were eliminated from further study based on the determination that it would not improve travel times, mobility, access, or connectivity between southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County, and would result in the greatest construction delays of all alternative concepts. Additional reasons are described in detail in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, Section 2.2.6.

