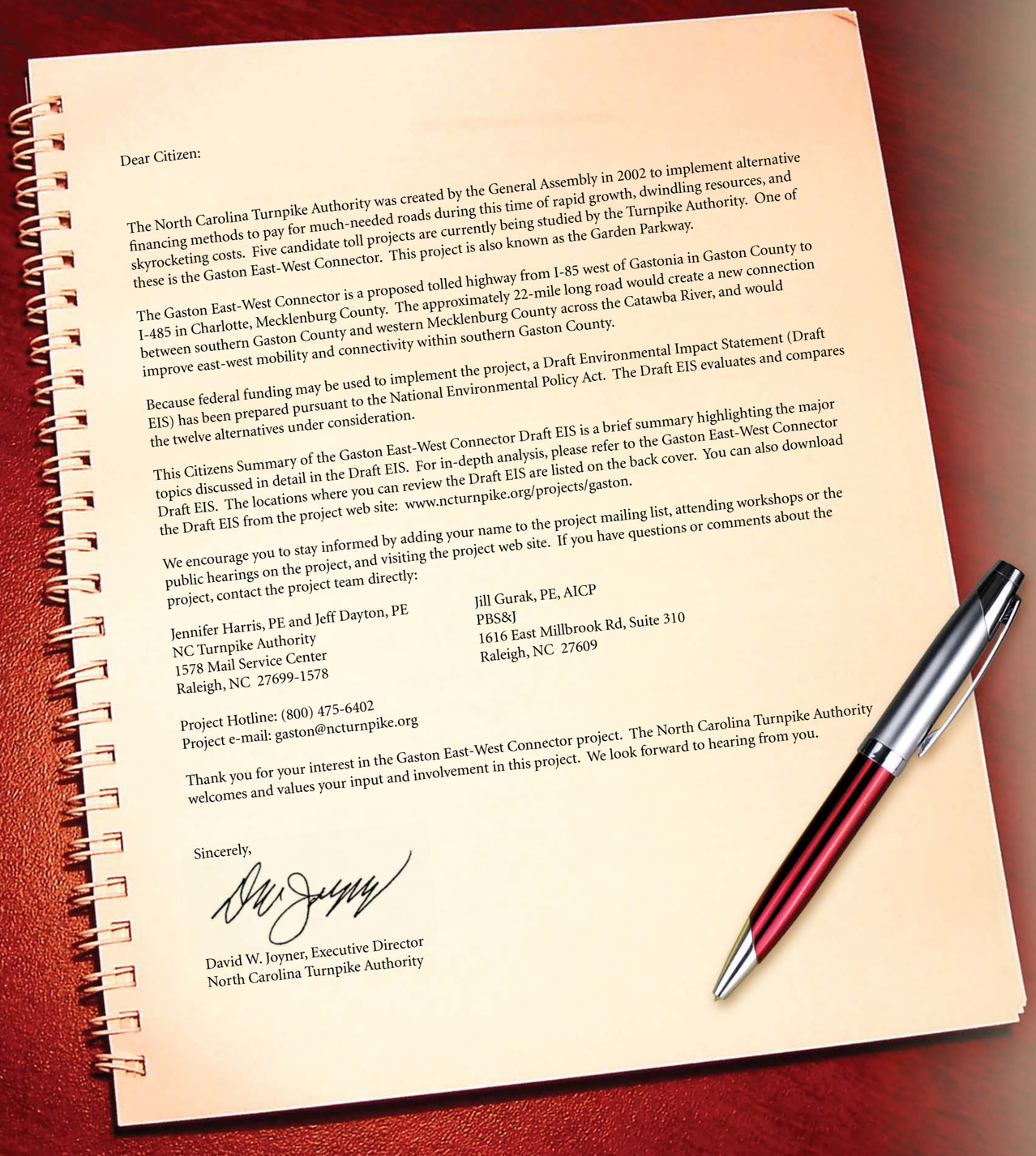
NORTH CAROLINA
Turnpike Authority




Gaston East-West Connector Citizens Summary

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

April 2009



Dear Citizen:

The North Carolina Turnpike Authority was created by the General Assembly in 2002 to implement alternative financing methods to pay for much-needed roads during this time of rapid growth, dwindling resources, and skyrocketing costs. Five candidate toll projects are currently being studied by the Turnpike Authority. One of these is the Gaston East-West Connector. This project is also known as the Garden Parkway.

The Gaston East-West Connector is a proposed tolled highway from I-85 west of Gastonia in Gaston County to I-485 in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County. The approximately 22-mile long road would create a new connection between southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County across the Catawba River, and would improve east-west mobility and connectivity within southern Gaston County.

Because federal funding may be used to implement the project, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) has been prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act. The Draft EIS evaluates and compares the twelve alternatives under consideration.

This Citizens Summary of the Gaston East-West Connector Draft EIS is a brief summary highlighting the major topics discussed in detail in the Draft EIS. For in-depth analysis, please refer to the Gaston East-West Connector Draft EIS. The locations where you can review the Draft EIS are listed on the back cover. You can also download the Draft EIS from the project web site: www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston.

We encourage you to stay informed by adding your name to the project mailing list, attending workshops or the public hearings on the project, and visiting the project web site. If you have questions or comments about the project, contact the project team directly:

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Thank you for your interest in the Gaston East-West Connector project. The North Carolina Turnpike Authority welcomes and values your input and involvement in this project. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

David W. Joyner, Executive Director
North Carolina Turnpike Authority

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

DSA – Detailed Study Alternative
EIS – Environmental Impact Statement
ETC – Electronic Toll Collection
FHWA – Federal Highway Administration
GUAMPO – Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
LRTP – Long Range Transportation Plan
MSAT – Mobile Source Air Toxics
MUMPO – Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization
NCDOT – North Carolina Department of Transportation
NCTA – North Carolina Turnpike Authority
NEPA – National Environmental Policy Act
NOI – Notice of Intent
ROD – Record of Decision
STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program

Project Description

How do projects originate?

The development of a project from concept to construction takes many years, and starts at the local level. First, local and state planners identify future roadway needs, which are then included on the local Thoroughfare Plan. Second, local officials propose roadway projects from the Thoroughfare Plan to be included in the local Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). The LRTP is the plan developed to meet area traffic demands for at least the next 20 years. Local officials set priorities for transportation projects and work with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to include projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program.

Project History

In the 1990s, the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GUAMPO) led an extensive effort to develop a corridor location for the Garden Parkway to include in their Thoroughfare Plan. The corridor GUAMPO identified is one of the many new roadway alternatives considered in the NEPA process for this project.

What is the Gaston East-West Connector?

The Gaston East-West Connector is a proposed tolled highway that would provide a new roadway through southern Gaston County and a new connection over the Catawba River between southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County. It would begin at I-85 west of Gastonia and end at I-485 in Mecklenburg County near the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport.

The project is known locally both as the "Gaston East-West Connector" and as the "Garden Parkway." The Draft EIS refers to the project as the Gaston East-West Connector.

The project is in the NCDOT's 2009-2015 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as STIP Project Number U-3321 and it is designated as a NC Strategic Highway Corridor. It is also included in local Long Range Transportation Plans as a new location roadway running through southern Gaston County and connecting over the Catawba River to Mecklenburg County.

Why do we need the Gaston East-West Connector?

The purpose of the Gaston East-West Connector is to improve east-west mobility and connectivity within southern Gaston County and between southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County.

Within southern Gaston County, south of I-85, a lack of connecting east-west roadways increases travel times and distances and limits local mobility. Between Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties, the limited number of bridges over the Catawba River constrains travel. Projected growth in the area will continue to increase transportation demands between the two counties, and traffic volumes and congestion on existing major roads will continue to increase.

How were the project alternatives developed?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires an agency to study the adverse and beneficial impacts of a range of reasonable alternatives that meet the purpose and need for a project. For the Gaston East-West Connector, a multi-step process (described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS) was used to narrow down the range of alternatives to the 12 Detailed Study Alternatives (DSAs). For the new location alternatives, over 90 preliminary study corridors were initially considered.

Public and agency input were an important part of the process, and numerous workshops, small group meetings, and agency meetings were held to provide opportunities for comments.

What alternatives are being considered?

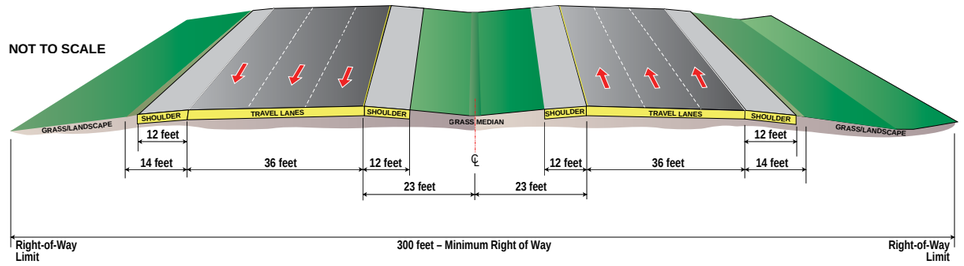
The 12 DSAs currently under consideration are shown on the map on Pages 6-7 of this Citizens Summary. The DSAs are labeled as DSAs 4, 5, 9, 22, 23, 27, 58, 64, 68, 76, 77, and 81. The corridors that make up each DSA overlap one another and there are common segments along the corridors. For example, DSAs 4, 5, and 9 all use the same corridor segments on the western end of the project.

The corridors for each DSA are 1,400 feet wide, with wider areas around proposed interchanges. Detailed information for each corridor was collected and analyzed in order to develop the preliminary alignments for the toll road. The toll road would have a minimum right-of-way width of 300 feet and would be located within the 1,400-foot wide corridor. The preliminary design alignments developed for the toll road within each DSA corridor are shown in Figure 2-9 in the Draft EIS, and these designs were used to estimate impacts. Please note the preliminary alignments are subject to change as the project moves forward in the process. However, the alignments must stay within the DSA corridor areas, or additional data collection and new studies would be required.

Are non-toll alternatives being considered?

While a non-toll alternative on new location would meet the purpose of the project, it is not financially feasible. There are many high-priority projects statewide and, due to financial constraints, there is not enough funding available from traditional sources in the foreseeable future to construct the Gaston East-West Connector as a non-toll road.

PROPOSED ROAD CONFIGURATION



NOTE: Four lanes may be built initially, resulting in a wider grass median. The 5th and 6th travel lanes would be the innermost travel lanes.

Where would interchanges be provided?

Each DSA has 11 to 12 proposed interchanges, as shown on the map on Pages 6-7 of this Citizens Summary.

What would the toll road look like?

The toll road would be a controlled-access highway, proposed to have six lanes and a 46-foot wide median.

If an assessment of updated traffic forecasts for the Preferred Alternative demonstrates that only four lanes are needed, then the middle two lanes of the six-lane roadway would not be constructed, resulting in a wider median. The two middle lanes could be built at a later date if needed, with no additional right of way required.

Are any of the alternatives recommended over the others?

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), NCTA, and NCDOT have identified **DSA 9 as the Recommended Alternative** (see map on Pages 6-7) based on a balance of cost and design considerations, impacts to the human and natural environments, and input received to date from agencies and the public. It should be noted that the "Recommended Alternative" is only a recommendation; it is not a Preferred Alternative and it is not a final decision.

Having a Recommended Alternative in the Draft EIS provides the public with an indication of the lead agencies' current thinking. After the public and environmental resource and regulatory agencies have an opportunity to provide comments on the Draft EIS, the FHWA, NCTA and NCDOT will identify the Preferred Alternative, taking into account this additional input.

Want to know more about the NCTA? Visit our web site at www.ncturnpike.org

Traffic Projections and Tolling Information

How much traffic would use the Gaston East-West Connector?

A computer model was used to predict year 2030 traffic volumes along the Gaston East-West Connector. The preliminary designs for the toll road were developed so that acceptable levels of service would be provided along the toll road for the forecasted traffic volumes.

Predicted year 2030 traffic volumes on the toll road vary slightly by DSA and also vary between the proposed interchanges (see the table on this page). The forecasted traffic volumes are highest on the eastern end of the project.

How much time would I save by using the Gaston East-West Connector?

With the toll road 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. The table on Page 5 of this Citizens Summary and Appendix C in the Draft EIS provide more details on travel time savings achieved by the project. In addition, the toll road would provide benefits even to travelers who do not use it. Computer modeling estimates that with the toll road, congested vehicle hours traveled in 2030 throughout Gaston County would be 6 to 7 percent less than under the No-Build Alternative.

Who can use the toll road?

Anybody willing to pay the toll will be able to use the highway, including passenger cars, buses, light-duty trucks, and heavy-duty trucks.

How will tolls be collected?

Tolls will be paid through an electronic toll collection (ETC) system. There will not be toll booths for on-site cash collection. The primary means of ETC will involve setting up an account with NCTA and using a transponder/receiver system. The transponder is a small device usually mounted on the windshield. The receiver is typically mounted over the roadway, and it electronically collects tolls from a driver's account as the vehicle travels under it at highway speed. The NCTA will work with other toll authorities to enable, where possible, other systems' transponders to work on the Gaston East-West Connector. Toll road users also will have the option of acquiring transponders with prepaid tolls. In addition, NCTA will operate a facility near the project that will accept cash payments so establishing an account is not required to use the toll road.

What if I don't have a transponder?

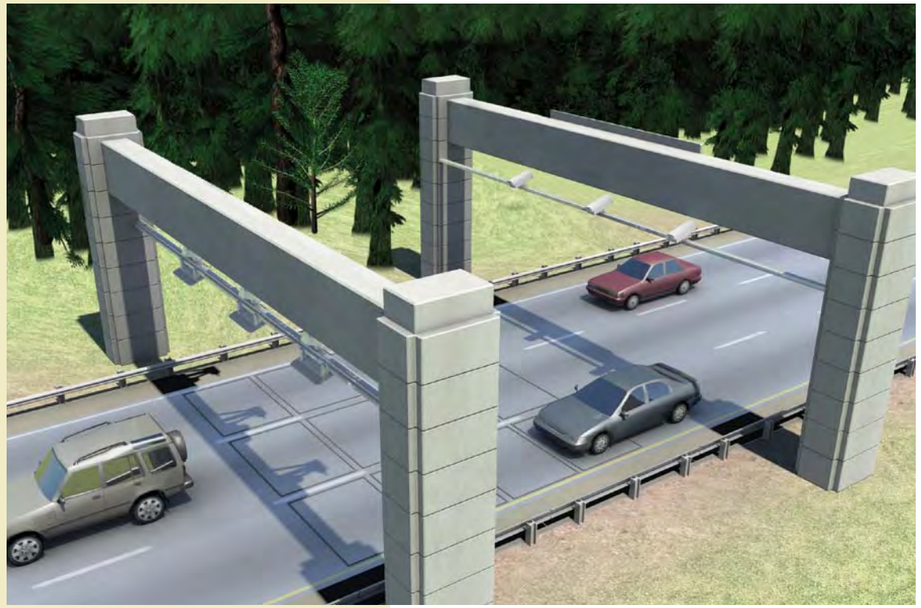
For travelers who do not have a transponder, a video system will capture license plate information and NCTA will bill the vehicle's registered owner.

How much will the tolls cost?

The NCTA has not made any decisions about toll rates. The initial price of the toll will be based upon an Investment Grade Traffic and Revenue Study, to be completed prior to project construction. The price of the toll may change over time, based upon variables such as demand, financing of the project's construction, and operations and maintenance costs. The toll rate likely will be more for trucks than for cars.

Year 2030 Traffic Volume Forecast

Segments of the Gaston East-West Connector (from West to East)	Approximate vehicles per day
I-85 to US 29-74	10,000-13,000
US 29-74 to Linwood Road	11,000-21,000
Linwood Road to US 321	10,000-17,000
US 321 to Robinson Road	19,000-21,000
Robinson Road to Bud Wilson Road (SR 2423)	29,000-30,000
Bud Wilson Road to NC 274 (Union Road)	28,000-29,000
NC 274 to NC 279 (S New Hope Road)	32,000-35,000
NC 279 to NC 273 (Southpoint Road)	42,000-44,000
NC 273 to Dixie River Road (SR 1155)	58,000-62,000
Dixie River Road to I-485	53,000-55,000



Typical ETC Structure

Typical ETC Transponder

Typical Toll Rates for Similar Facilities

Similar toll facilities around the country charge tolls in the range of 10 to 20 cents per mile.

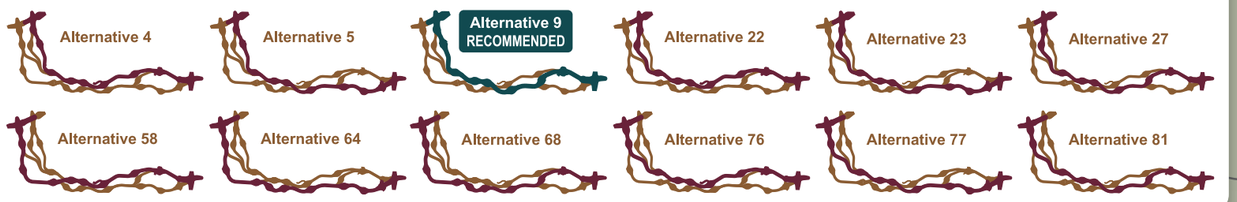
Estimated Travel Time Savings with the Toll Road in Place

From	To	Average Travel Time Savings in 2030
South Belmont	Downtown Gastonia	1-3 minutes
	US 321 at Robinson Road	8-10 minutes
	Charlotte-Douglas Airport	20-25 minutes
Southwest Gaston County	Downtown Gastonia	2-4 minutes
	Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden	7-9 minutes
	Charlotte-Douglas Airport	20-25 minutes
Charlotte-Douglas Airport	Downtown Bessemer City	8-10 minutes
	Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden	25-30 minutes

Typical ETC Structure

Detailed Study Alternatives Map

GASTON EAST-WEST CONNECTOR DETAILED STUDY ALTERNATIVES



Bessemer City
Ranlo
Lowell
McAdenville
Gastonia
Cramerton
Belmont
Charlotte
Linwood Springs Golf Course
Blackwood Creek
E Hudson Blvd
Crowders Mountain State Park
Chapel Grove Rd
Crowders Creek Rd
Lewis Rd
Freedom Mill Rd
Forbes Rd
Robinson Rd
Gastonia Municipal Airport
Catawba Creek
Union Rd
Forestview High School
Union New Hope Rd
South Fork Catawba River
Southpoint Rd
Allen Steam Station
Catawba River
Gaston County
Mecklenburg County
Wallace Neel Rd
West Blvd
Relocated West Blvd
Charlotte - Douglas International Airport
Berewick District Park
Dixie River Rd
Crowders Creek
Bud Wilson Rd
Rufus Ratchford Rd
S New Hope Rd
Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden
Gaston County, NC
York County, SC

Alternative 9 RECOMMENDED

NORTH CAROLINA Turnpike Authority

Gaston East-West Connector
NCDOT STIP Project No. U-3321

POTENTIAL INTERCHANGE LOCATIONS

① I-85
② US 29-74
③ Linwood Road
④ Lewis Road
⑤ US 321
⑥ Robinson Road
⑦ Bud Wilson Road
⑧ NC 274 (Union Road)
⑨ NC 279 (S. New Hope Road)
⑩ NC 273 (Southpoint Road)
⑪ Dixie River Road
⑫ I-485

NOTE: The Detailed Study Alternatives (DSAs) are 1,400 foot wide corridors (with larger areas around interchanges). The preliminary engineering designs for the road have a minimum right-of-way width of 300 feet and are located within the corridors. For a detailed look at the 12 DSAs, see Figure 2-9 in the Draft EIS, available at www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston.

0 0.5 1 Miles
N

Project Impacts

What are the impacts from the project?

The Draft EIS provides detailed discussions of the project's anticipated impacts to the environment, as well as ways to mitigate impacts. An excerpt from the Draft EIS's comprehensive impact summary table is included on Pages 10-11 of this Citizens Summary. Generally, impacts that were similar for each DSA are not included in the table. The Recommended Alternative column for (DSA 9) is shown in green.

How do I find out if the project affects my property or my neighborhood?

Section 3.2 of the Draft EIS discusses impacts to neighborhoods. Figure 2-9 in the Draft EIS shows the design alignments within each DSA corridor on maps that show parcel boundaries, roadways, streams, and other features. The exact right of way required for the Preferred Alternative will be determined during final design, after the NEPA process is completed.

IMPACTS TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Potential for Growth and Land Use Changes

All DSAs have the potential to indirectly accelerate growth, with the potential being high for Gaston County, moderate for Mecklenburg County, and moderate for York County. However, all DSAs would be consistent with local land use and transportation plans.

Homes, Businesses, and Neighborhoods

All DSAs would relocate businesses and residences and impact neighborhoods. The types of effects on neighborhoods range from a minor right-of-way encroachment to total displacement of a neighborhood. The most impacts to neighborhoods would be in the area between I-85 and US 321. The NCTA will follow state and federal regulations and NCDOT policies for right-of-way acquisition and relocation.

Community Resources and Services

All DSAs, except for DSA 81, would require relocation of at least one church and/or cemetery. DSA 9 (Recommended) would impact two churches. Overall, DSA 27 would have the least impacts to community resources, while DSAs 5 and 64 would have the most impacts.

Parks

All DSAs would require a minor amount of land from Mecklenburg County's future Berewick District Park. However, the park's access and uses would not be affected.

Historic Sites

Approximately 29 acres from the 257-acre Wolfe Family Dairy Farm (an historic site located northwest of the I-85/Edgewood Road interchange) would be required to construct DSA 58, 64, 68, 76, 77, or 81. With implementation of design measures coordinated with the Historic Preservation Office, there would be No Adverse Effect to the property.

IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Utilities

All DSAs would cross power transmission lines, natural gas lines, water lines, sewer lines, and other utilities. NCTA will coordinate utility relocations with the appropriate providers to ensure disruption to service is minimized.

Hazardous Materials

Potentially contaminated sites are located within all the DSAs and include leaking underground storage tanks, manufacturing facilities, junkyards, and old landfills. Impact severity is anticipated to be low to medium for all DSAs. Further assessments will be conducted for the Preferred Alternative.

Traffic Noise

Preliminary noise barriers that would reduce traffic noise at nearby residences have been identified at several locations along each DSA. A Design Noise Study will be prepared during final design of the Preferred Alternative using updated traffic forecasts and more refined engineering designs to finalize the locations of barriers.

Air Quality

There would be no difference between any of the alternatives on effects to regional air quality. A qualitative assessment for mobile source air toxics (MSAT) was completed, but current tools and science are not adequate to quantify the health impacts from MSATs.

Visual Effects

All DSAs would result in visual impacts to riverfront residents and boaters on the Catawba River and South Fork Catawba River. The project would include a landscaping plan to enhance aesthetics.

Farmland

The project is in a rapidly growing area, with agriculture and pasture making up about 7 to 15 percent of the total land needed to construct the project (11 percent for DSA 9). Each DSA affects parcels designated by Gaston County as voluntary agricultural districts, with DSAs 4, 5, 9, 22, 23, and 27 impacting the least acreage in these districts, and DSAs 64 and 68 the most.

IMPACTS TO THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Water Resources

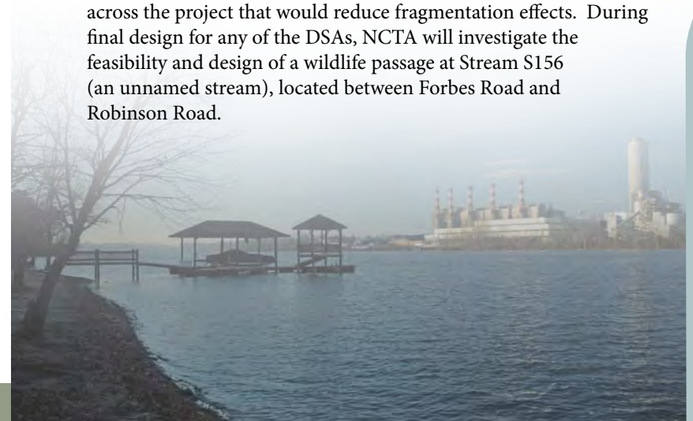
DSAs 5, 23, 64, and 77 cross the Catawba River and South Fork Catawba River in areas with greater potential to impact water-based recreation. All DSAs would have indirect and cumulative effects to water quality, which can be minimized through compliance with local stormwater ordinances and implementation of Best Management Practices.

Streams, Wetlands and Ponds

Project construction within any of the DSAs cannot be accomplished without impacting surface waters; including streams, wetlands, and ponds. As a condition of required permits, the NCTA would have to compensate for stream and wetland impacts, which may include restoring or enhancing degraded streams and wetlands in the project area's watersheds through on-site mitigation or in-lieu fee payments to the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources' Ecosystem Enhancement Program. A mitigation plan will be prepared for the Preferred Alternative.

Wildlife Habitat

All DSAs have the potential to indirectly affect wildlife due to habitat fragmentation. DSAs 5, 23, 27, 58, 64, 68, 77, and 81 would have greater potential for effects compared to the other DSAs because these corridors are farther from previously fragmented forestland. NCTA worked with environmental resource and regulatory agencies to identify locations for habitat connections across the project that would reduce fragmentation effects. During final design for any of the DSAs, NCTA will investigate the feasibility and design of a wildlife passage at Stream S156 (an unnamed stream), located between Forbes Road and Robinson Road.



Protected Species

The DSAs were surveyed for federally-protected plants and animals. A population of the federally-endangered Schweinitz's sunflower was found on the northern edge of DSAs 4, 22, 58 and 76. The biological conclusion for these DSAs is "May Affect/Not Likely to Adversely Affect." Other DSAs would have "No Effect" on this plant. Concurrence from the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the biological conclusion for DSAs 4, 22, 58, and 76 would be needed if one of these DSAs is chosen as the Preferred Alternative.

Different Kinds of Effects Analyzed in a Draft EIS

- Direct Effects: Effects caused by the action and occurring at the same time.
- Indirect Effects: Effects caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but still readily predicted.
- Cumulative Effects: Effects to the environment that occur when project effects are added to the effects of other actions and projects that have already occurred or are reasonably foreseeable.

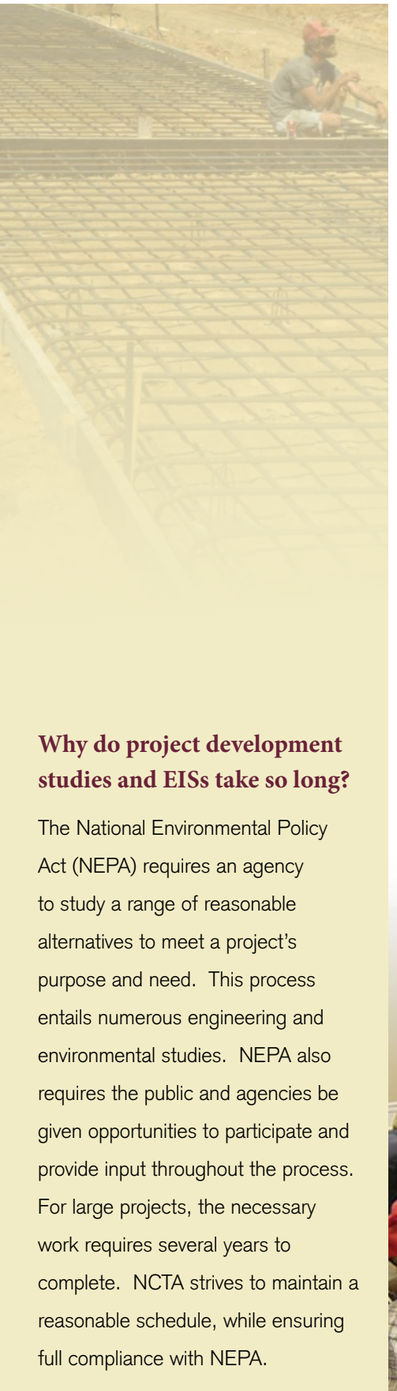
Summary of Project Impacts

Summary of Project Impacts (an excerpt from the Draft EIS Table S-2: Summary of Environmental Impacts)

Issue	Detailed Study Alternative											
	4	5	9 Recommended	22	23	27	58	64	68	76	77	81
Length (miles)	21.4	21.5	21.9	21.9	22.0	22.4	23.1	23.3	23.7	21.8	21.9	22.2
HUMAN ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL RESOURCES												
Residential Relocations	377	358	348	373	354	344	359	336	326	384	365	355
Business Relocations	38	33	37	40	35	39	30	26	30	29	24	28
Public Parks Impacted (Berewick District Park)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Private Recreational Facilities[1] Impacted	2[b,d]	3[b,c,e]	3[b,c,d]	1[d]	2[c,e]	2[c,d]	2[a,d]	3[a,c,e]	3[a,c,d]	2[a,d]	3[a,c,e]	3[a,c,d]
Schools[2] Impacted	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	1	1
Churches with Impacts to Main Buildings	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	1	0
Cemeteries Requiring Relocation	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0
Potential to Contain Significant Archaeological Resources	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low	Low	High	Moderate to High	Moderate to High	High	Moderate	Moderate
Potential for Indirect Effects on Farmland	Least	Least	Least	Least	Least	Least	Moderate	Most	Most	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT FEATURES												
Total # of Noise Impacted Receptors	302	271	245	298	267	241	272	231	204	309	278	276
Total # of Noise Barriers	13	11	12	11	9	10	8	6	7	10	8	9
Air Quality Impacts	A qualitative assessment for mobile source air toxics (MSATs) was completed, but current tools and science are not adequate to quantify the health impacts from MSATs.											
Power Transmission Line Crossings[3]	14	13	14	14	13	14	18	17	17	17	15	17
Hazardous Materials Sites (all impacts are low to medium severity)	24	23	24	22	21	22	14	12	13	14	13	14
LAND COVER TYPES												
Disturbed/Clearcut (acres)[4]	552	561	567	544	553	560	513	535	542	514	523	529
Agricultural (acres)[4]	121	142	177	121	142	177	153	220	256	128	148	184
Upland Forested (acres)[4]	913	902	882	982	972	951	1,042	1,008	987	965	955	935
Indirect effects on wildlife through habitat fragmentation	Weak to Moderate	Strong	Weak to Moderate	Weak to Moderate	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Weak to Moderate	Strong	Strong
WATER RESOURCES												
Pond Impacts (acres)[5]	6.3	5.1	4.1	5.1	3.9	2.9	5.5	3.1	2.1	5.5	6.1	3.3
Wetland Impacts (acres)[5]	7.4	6.9	7.5	8.8	8.2	8.9	12.1	12.5	13.2	9.7	9.1	9.8
Total Stream Crossings	106	99	91	111	105	97	120	112	103	111	105	97
Total Stream Impacts (linear ft)[5]	57,344	52,234	48,995	59,053	54,015	50,772	60,244	50,452	47,209	55,469	49,711	47,188
Total Impacts to Catawba River/Lake Wylie Buffers (sq ft)[6]	4,145	22,590	20,615	4,145	22,590	20,615	4,145	22,590	20,615	4,145	22,590	20,615
Floodplain Crossings	12	13	13	12	13	13	11	12	12	10	11	11
Indirect effects on water resources	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong	Very Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
ENDANGERED SPECIES (DSAs marked with a * have a biological conclusion of "May Affect/Not Likely to Adversely Affect")												
Schweinitz's Sunflower	*	"No Effect"	"No Effect"	*	"No Effect"	"No Effect"	*	"No Effect"	"No Effect"	*	"No Effect"	"No Effect"

1. a) Karyae YMCA Family Outdoor Center – impact to structures, entrance, parking
   b) Linwood Springs Golf Course – access change only
   c) Carolina Speedway – right-of-way encroachment and impact to parking
   d) Duke Energy Corporation recreational fields – right-of-way encroachment
   e) Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden – minor right-of-way encroachment
2. DSAs 4, 22, 58 and 76 encroach on Forestview High School's property edge and some parking areas.
   DSAs 58, 64, 68, 76, 77, and 81 encroach on Sadler Elementary School property with no impacts to school use or access.
3. There may be one to three individual lines in a power transmission easement. This table reports the numbers of individual transmission line crossings.
4. Acreages calculated within the DSA preliminary design right-of-way limits.
5. Impacts calculated using the preliminary engineering designs construction limits, with an additional 25-foot buffer.
6. Mitigation not required for impacts of less than one-third acre (14,505 square feet).

Process, Schedule and Cost



Why do project development studies and EISs take so long?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires an agency to study a range of reasonable alternatives to meet a project's purpose and need. This process entails numerous engineering and environmental studies. NEPA also requires the public and agencies be given opportunities to participate and provide input throughout the process. For large projects, the necessary work requires several years to complete. NCTA strives to maintain a reasonable schedule, while ensuring full compliance with NEPA.

Who makes the final decision on which alternative to build, and when?

Some federal funds would likely be used to build the Gaston East-West Connector. The FHWA is the lead federal agency in charge of the project. Therefore, the FHWA, in coordination with NCTA and NCDOT, will select the Preferred Alternative, which may or may not be the current Recommended Alternative. The Preferred Alternative will be selected based on information in the Draft EIS and input received during the Draft EIS review period from the public and local, state, and federal agencies and at the public hearings.

Does my opinion matter?

Yes, your opinion and input matters in the decisions about the project. All comments are considered, whether they are mailed or emailed to the project team throughout the process, or delivered or spoken in person at one of the open houses and public hearings set for the spring/summer of 2009. All comments will be part of the project record.

When would project construction start?

The current schedule anticipates project construction starting in the first quarter of 2011, with completion near the end of 2014.

How much would the project cost?

The project would cost between $1.18 billion and $1.52 billion, depending on the alternative chosen, and the cost of materials and land at the time. The estimated costs include construction, administration, utility relocation, environmental mitigation, and right-of-way acquisition.

How would the project be paid for?

The project would be funded by a combination of sources, including revenue bonds, TIFIA loans (loans available from the federal government through the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act), state and federal funds, and gap funding approved by the NC General Assembly. Revenue bonds would be paid using the tolls over the course of 30 to 40 years.

TIMELINE INFORMATION

Past Events

1989	The Gaston Urban Area MPO (GUAMPO) identifies need for project.
1991	GUAMPO includes the "US 321/74 Bypass" (another name for the Garden Parkway) on their Thoroughfare Plan.
1994	Mecklenburg-Union MPO includes the US 321/74 Bypass on their Thoroughfare Plan.
2000	NCDOT begins the NEPA process.
2002	The NC General Assembly creates the North Carolina Turnpike Authority
2004	Project identified as a NC Strategic Highway Corridor.
2005	NCTA Board of Directors selects the project as a candidate toll facility and NCTA assumes administration of the project.
2006	Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS is published.
2006-2009	Designs and studies prepared for the Detailed Study Alternatives
2nd Quarter 2009	Draft EIS published, including Recommended Alternative

Future Events

2nd Quarter 2009	Public Hearings held for the Gaston East-West Connector
4th Quarter 2009	Preferred Alternative Selected
2nd Quarter 2010	Final EIS published for the Gaston East-West Connector
4th Quarter 2010	Record of Decision (ROD) published
1st Quarter 2011	Construction begins
4th Quarter 2014	Project open to traffic

Detailed Study Alternative	Potential Range of Total Cost (billions $)
4	$1.18 - $1.41
5	$1.21 - $1.45
9 (Recommended)	**$1.18 - $1.42**
22	$1.24 - $1.48
23	$1.27 - $1.52
27	$1.24 - $1.48
58	$1.22 - $1.46
64	$1.24 - $1.49
68	$1.21 - $1.45
76	$1.20 - $1.44
77	$1.24 - $1.48
81	$1.20 - $1.44

Environmental Impact Statements (EISs)

NEPA requires federal agencies to prepare an EIS for major federal actions that are expected to have a significant impact on the environment. (For more information go to http://environment.fhwa.dot.gov/index.asp.)

An EIS is a detailed report that defines the transportation problem, discusses the range of alternative solutions considered, discloses the impacts the alternatives would have on the human and natural environments, summarizes involvement with the public and other stakeholders, and aids in making decisions about the project.

The EIS process includes the following four milestones:

1. Notice of Intent (NOI). The NOI is published in the Federal Register and signals the initiation of the EIS process (April 27, 2006 for this project).
2. Draft EIS. After publication, there is a formal comment period and Public Hearings.
3. Final EIS. The Final EIS addresses comments received on the Draft EIS and identifies the Preferred Alternative.
4. Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD identifies the Selected Alternative, explains why it was chosen, and provides information on ways to minimize and compensate for project impacts.

The Gaston East-West Connector Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the Corridor/Design Public Hearing maps are available for public review at the locations listed below.

NCTA*
5400 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 400
Raleigh, NC 27612
(919) 571-3000

NCDOT Division 10 office*
716 West Main Street
Albemarle, NC 28001
(704) 982-0101

NCDOT Division 12 office*
1710 East Marion Street
Shelby, NC 28150
(704) 480-9020

Gaston County Planning Department*
120 West Main Avenue, Room 217
Gastonia, NC 28053-1578
(704) 866-3195

MUMPO/Charlotte-Mecklenburg*
Planning Department
600 East Fourth Street (8th Floor)
Charlotte, NC 28202
(704) 336-2205

Belmont Branch Library
125 North Central Avenue
Belmont, NC 28012
(704) 825-5426

Bessemer City Branch Library
207 North 12th Street
Bessemer City, NC 28016
(704) 629-3321

Gaston County Library
1555 East Garrison Boulevard
Gastonia, NC 28054
(704) 868-2164

Lowell Branch Library
203 McAdenville Road
Lowell, NC 28098
(704) 824-1266

Steele Creek Branch Library
13620 Steele Creek Road
Charlotte, NC 28273
(704) 588-4345

Union Road Branch Library
5800 Union Road
Gastonia, NC 28056
(704) 852-4073

The Draft EIS in its entirety (and the Corridor/Design Public Hearing maps) is also available for download at the NCTA Web site www.ncturnpike.org/projects/gaston. In addition, locations marked with an * will have reduced size sets of the maps to be on display at the Corridor/Design Public Hearing. All other locations will have a reduced size copy of the Project Overview map, as well as a CD to view all other mapping to be available at the Corridor/Design Public Hearing.

NORTH CAROLINA
Turnpike Authority

PBS&J