



# I-77 South Express Lanes

## January 2026

### Project Overview

- The I-77 South Express Lanes project will upgrade 11 miles of I-77 from the S.C. state line to I-277/N.C. 16 (Brookshire Freeway).
- With current traffic demand (160,000 vehicles/day), travel times on this segment range from 10 minutes to nearly an hour depending on time of day and direction of travel.
- Crash rates for this segment of I-77 are 2.5x higher than the statewide average for urban interstates.
  - Congestion is attributed to increased crash rates
- The purpose of the project is to manage congestion by providing an option for reliable travel times and improve traffic operations by increasing travel speeds and throughput along I-77.
- The proposed improvements include the addition of express lanes, reconstruction of interchanges and non-interchange bridges, and addition of access points and direct connectors to the express lanes.
- Enhancements to the bicycle and pedestrian network are planned on streets that cross the corridor. NCDOT has coordinated closely with the City of Charlotte to identify bicycle and pedestrian improvements to be included in the project design.
- Per state law (§ 136-89.183(a)(2)), toll projects in NC must be requested/approved by local planning organizations.
  - The Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO) first submitted the project to NCDOT's state prioritization in 2014.
- In October 2024, CRTPO provided a resolution for NCDOT to move forward with a Public-Private Partnership (P3) delivery process and created a working group in partnership with NCDOT to identify project priorities and develop key contract terms. Some project priorities identified by the working group include:
  - Optimize utilization of express lanes and general-purpose lanes with toll rate caps
  - Encourage a competitive procurement process

- Increase transparency during all phases of the project (construction, operations, etc.)
- Provide benefits to transit

### Community Benefits

- Toll-free eligible transit and HOV3+ access
- Discount program for low-income residents
- Modernizing pedestrian friendly designs on bridges, overpasses and cross streets where interchanges are reconstructed.
- Fair and flexible strategies to lessen toll rates (toll rate caps) and optimize utilization will be in place to manage congestion by those using the express lanes.
- The Charlotte Regional Business Alliance has stated the project will create jobs, attract investment, and strengthen economic mobility for decades to come.

### Community Engagement

- Community engagement is a critical part of the project design process, and NCDOT is receiving feedback from local communities through public meetings and various communication channels to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.
- In 2025, NCDOT presented project information at nearly 30 small group meetings and two formal public meetings, reaching nearly 2,000 people.
- NCDOT has heard concerns and comments from communities and is incorporating feedback into an updated design.
- Engagement will continue throughout environmental review and procurement. NCDOT is also adding more options to meet:
  - **Community engagement center** (staffed for questions and feedback)
  - Recurring **office hours** for 1-on-1 conversations
  - More information about the community engagement center and office hours **will be released soon**.

### Project Design Process

- The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a federal law that requires the assessment of the environmental and human impacts of proposed projects and

- the exploration of design alternatives prior to making a final decision.
- The environmental review process under NEPA provides opportunities for communities to get involved and provide feedback to inform the project design.
- NCDOT is evaluating neighborhood connectivity, air quality, noise, water resources and wildlife and identifying ways to eliminate impacts where possible.
- NCDOT cannot finalize a project design until the NEPA process is complete.

## Preliminary Design Alternatives

- Median Widening: adds express lanes in the median of I-77, which would require the reconstruction of most interchanges.
- Elevated Option (North of Belk): constructs express lanes over the existing interstate or to the side of the existing interstate, which substantially reduces neighborhood impacts.
- The elevated option would reduce community impacts compared to the interstate widening alternative. NCDOT is evaluating additional alternatives and will use the NEPA process to identify the alternative that best meets the project purpose while avoiding and minimizing impacts
- Additionally, the project design will continue to evolve through the P3 procurement process as NCDOT will prioritize developers to propose additional ideas to further eliminate impacts where possible.
- NCDOT has heard feedback requesting that I-77 be relocated underground in a tunnel(s). NCDOT has found that tunnels are expensive to build and maintain and can come with increased risk during construction.
- NCDOT reviewed and compared other major tunnel projects such as the Big Dig (Boston) and Alaskan Way (Seattle).
- Based on those comparisons, relocating I-77 underground would cost approximately \$36-\$60 billion (10-20x NCDOT's annual capital budget). Maintenance costs would be more than \$50 million a year (nearly all NCDOT Division 10's annual maintenance fund for bridge/roadway maintenance, potholes, etc.). At that scale, relocating I-77 underground is

not financially feasible with current public and private funding.

- In addition, relocating I-77 underground could take several decades to complete.
- For context, the Seattle Viaduct Tunnel project completed in 2019 was just under two miles long and took nearly six years to complete. The Big Dig (Boston) tunnel was 8 miles long and took nearly 16 years to complete.

## Next Steps

- NCDOT's priority is to deliver transportation improvements on behalf of the region that respect the history of the neighborhoods along the corridor.
- NCDOT will continue to engage residents, stakeholders, and CRTPO to provide updates and seek feedback, which will inform the final design of the I-77 South Express Lanes project.
- Public input is a critical part of the project design process, and NCDOT will continue to work closely with residents, community leaders, and local governments to ensure transparency, minimize disruption, and explore solutions that reconnect rather than divide.

## Project Contacts

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## Project Schedule\*



\*Schedule is subject to change

For more project information



Scan to visit the project website  
<https://www.ncdot.gov/projects/i-77-south-express-lanes>

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