

DOT to divert I-40 from loop

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State officials are completely rerouting Interstate 40 away from Greensboro's new western Urban Loop, responding to persistent complaints about high noise levels along the newest leg of the city's bypass.

The interstate will return to its original east-west route through the city as soon as possible, reverting the great bulk of the loud and ground-shaking truck traffic to the route it used for decades before this winter.

"We truly heard the complaints," said Doug Galyon, chairman of the state Board of Transportation and a Greensboro resident. "We were concerned about it, so we just sat down, put our heads together and said, 'What can we do?'"

Galyon said he and others at the state Department of Transportation began considering the possibility of restoring I-40 to its original course immediately after an angry meeting about the loop on May 22.

Irate neighbors of the 7.7-mile, \$122 million stretch of road said they had been surprised by the volume of truck traffic on what they understood would be a bypass more on the order of Bryan Boulevard.

Galyon said the redesignation means most of that traffic will return to I-40's initial route as soon as the state can prepare and install new signs.

The newest section of the loop will remain a major highway because it is still Interstate 73, the road that someday will extend from coastal South Carolina to northern Michigan.

But I-73 is still in its formative stage and carries much less traffic than I-40, which stretches coast to coast and is one of the nation's major east-west commercial arteries.

The loop through western Greensboro also will be designated Interstate 840, as the Urban Loop is known, on a route that eventually will encircle the city.

Residents along the western loop were caught off-guard by the decision, which was announced Friday at 4:56 p.m., but said they were pleasantly surprised.

“That’s the way it should have been from the very first. It’s fantastic news,” said Doug Coleman, a resident of the Idle Acres neighborhood near the Urban Loop’s interchange with West Wendover Avenue.

Sedgefield Trails homeowner Ron Frazier was so pleased, he said he and his neighbors would happily help DOT paint new signs if it would speed the transition.

“It’s really going to help us a load re-routing the trucks,” he said. “It makes my weekend.”

But another homeowner said this should serve as a lesson to DOT that the public must be consulted closely and continually during planning, design and construction.

“Meetings with us that should have taken place all during that process were never held,” said Steve Gladson of the Kings Mill neighborhood.

DOT’s primary concern in making the change was traffic safety, particularly in the death valley area of eastern Greensboro where U.S. 29, 70 and 220 merge with the interstate, Galyon said.

But traffic engineers have satisfied themselves that reviving I-40 through town would work, particularly knowing that the next phase of the Eastern Urban Loop will direct much of the traffic on the three U.S. routes away from death valley, he said.

That next phase of the loop, scheduled to begin in about three years, will link Interstate 40/85 east of town to U.S. 29 north of the Carolina Circle area.

The Federal Highway Administration also had to approve the decision to return what’s now Business 40 to its former status as a full-fledged interstate, Galyon said.

North Carolina will not be penalized financially or any other way by the Federal Highway Administration for the change because the loop through western Greensboro remains part of the interstate system and is still a valuable addition to the nation’s road network, Galyon said.

As part of its earlier response to the outcry over noise, DOT promised it would install a high level of landscaping along that part of the loop, even though state officials said it would do little to counteract noise.

The state still will carry out those plans despite the re-routing of I-40, Galyon said.

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Inset: Changes to I-40

The I-40 relocation plan includes:

Changing the green I-40 Business signs back to the blue I-40 signs

Re-labeling the exits along I-40 as Exit 212 (I-40/73) to Exit 227 (I-40/85)

Re-labeling the exits along I-73 as Exit 103 (I-73/40 interchange) to Exit 95 (I-73/U.S. 220 interchange)

Rerouting U.S. 421 to run concurrently with I-73 and parts of I-85

Signs for the I-85 Business route and the I-85 exits will remain the same.