

I-73 link joins federal system; cost is unclear

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By Taft Wireback
Staff Writer
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GREENSBORO — New Interstate 73 will make a sharp turn to the east near Piedmont Triad International Airport, then tie into Bryan Boulevard and skirt western Greensboro on the city's Urban Loop, road planners agreed Thursday.

They added that general route to the National Highway System, making it eligible for federal money to build projects of national significance.

It's unclear when the new link, known as the "I-73 Connector," would be built or what it would cost. It would be part of a new road network extending from coastal South Carolina through northern Michigan.

The connector's final design will follow the outline the city Metropolitan Planning Organization endorsed Thursday, but its exact contours will be decided later, said Mike Mills of the state Department of Transportation.

"Right now, this is just a line on a map," said Mills, division engineer for the Greensboro area. "We don't have any of the environmental studies done. We can't say for sure, 'Here is where it's going.'"

The connector would include 1.2 miles of new highway heading east from the future interstate, what is now N.C. 68. It then would merge into Bryan Boulevard for 1.8 miles to Bryan's interchange with the loop.

Both that part of Bryan and the interchange are designed to handle I-73's additional traffic with little added construction, Mills said.

In other action, the MPO approved a \$2.5 million proposal to greatly improve evening bus service throughout the city.

The plan uses \$1.9 million in federal air-pollution-fighting grants to double the number of Greensboro Transit Authority buses after 7:30 p.m. weekdays and after 7 p.m. Saturdays.

"Currently, we go from 15 routes down to seven in the evening, and those routes are truncated," acting city Transportation Director Adam Fischer told the MPO. The organization is a panel of elected city and Guilford County officials who advise state DOT on local transportation issues.

The city will contribute \$622,000 in matching funds during the grant's three-year term. GTA estimates the new service will increase ridership by about 60,000 passengers a year, Fischer said.

MPO members also heard complaints about home damage said to be caused by the most recently opened section of the Urban Loop.

Brenda Gladson said her house in the Kings Mill subdivision beside the new road suffered damage either from the loop's construction or current traffic vibrations. The most recent discovery was cracked roof trusses, she said.

State officials are looking into the problem and awaiting a report from an engineer, and will fix any problems attributable to the road, Mills told the board.

City Councilman Robbie Perkins, MPO chairman, said Gladson and other Kings Mill residents with similar complaints deserve to know quickly what, if anything, state officials can do.

"They need information, and they need action," he said.

Contact Taft Wireback at 373-7100 or taft.wireback@news-record.com