

## **I-73 route adopted for Greensboro**

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GREENSBORO - Those "Future Interstate 73" signs will come down soon along part of the new interstate's route through Guilford County.

And they'll be replaced with the real thing - I-73 shields - after a decision last week by the Greensboro Metropolitan Planning Organization to formally adopt a route for the new freeway.

The group that supervises transportation planning in the Greensboro area unanimously endorsed the route that combines parts of U.S. 220, N.C. 68, Bryan Boulevard and Greensboro's western Urban Loop.

It always was intended the loop would carry I-73 around part of Greensboro, but initial plans envisioned the linkage south of existing Interstate 40, said Doug Galyon, a member of the local MPO and chairman of the state Board of Transportation.

As recently as five years ago, state highway officials planned to bring the interstate past Piedmont Triad International Airport on N.C. 68 and build a large interchange at that road's current intersection with I-40, Galyon said.

"But if you build a full-scale, interstate-level interchange there, the estimated cost of right of way was \$400 million," Galyon said. "So it became apparent that was not a practical solution. The loop is the most practical way of doing it."

As a result of the group's vote, new interstate shields will be installed along the loop north of Interstate 40. The rest of the western loop already has the correct signs.

But the MPO's action also means that as other parts of the route through Guilford County are brought up to interstate standards, they can bear the I-73 shield from Day One, Galyon said.

More importantly, it means those sections of road immediately qualify for interstate maintenance and improvement money from Uncle Sam, he said.

Eventually, I-73 will stretch from Myrtle Beach to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., near the Canadian border. The new interstate is being built in several parts of North Carolina, along with new Interstate 74 that is planned from Georgetown, S.C., to Cincinnati.

The two new highways merge south of High Point and travel into South Carolina together along what is now U.S. 220 South.

The next stage of I-73 construction is scheduled to begin in 2010 through southern Rockingham and northern Guilford counties, along a route now designated "the N.C. 68/U.S. 220 connector." That 12.4-mile, \$191 million connector would be built in several sections:

- a first phase of four miles that starts in southern Rockingham County, where N.C. 68 begins. Tracking existing U.S. 220 into northern Guilford County, it would not be built to interstate standards initially because U.S. 220 would continue into Greensboro as a standard highway.
- two later segments of about four miles each crossing new terrain and built as an interstate from the start. They are planned to skirt Stokesdale and Oak Ridge, merging with current N.C. 68 near Pleasant Ridge Road.

Construction of the connector's second and third phases is set to begin in 2013, after which the first phase would be upgraded to a freeway and be redesignated I-73.

The last link in I-73's route around Greensboro would stretch from what's now the intersection of N.C. 68 and Pleasant Ridge Road to Bryan Boulevard and the Urban Loop near PTI.

The MPO's most recently adopted long-range plan shows construction of that 3-mile, \$121.5 million link beginning sometime after 2015.

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