

## **Now, Not Later: Pushing for the Hwy. 68/220 Connection**

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ROCKINGHAM COUNTY, N.C. (WGHP) – The most important road project for Rockingham County is actually in Guilford County.

Transportation officials are currently working on plans to connect North Carolina Highway 68 and U.S. Highway 220 with Interstate 73. I-73 will be one of the main highways feeding into the new FedEx hub. Construction near Piedmont Triad International Airport is moving on schedule and the hub is set to open in summer 2009.

Rockingham County commissioner Bobby Stanley believes connecting Highways 68 and 220 needs to happen as soon as possible, not by the year 2015, the earliest completion date state transportation officials estimate.

"It's very important this road stay on track or we are going to miss out on some of the FedEx opportunities," said Stanley.

Transportation officials said speeding up the timetable is not practical because most of the money for the 68/220 connection comes from federal dollars and not all of it is guaranteed.

"Even if we had an influx of money come in, I'm not sure we could get the right of way plans done any sooner than 2010," said DOT development engineer Mike Mills.

The connection will allow the use of 18-wheelers pulling twin trailers, something currently not allowed. Twin haulers can only travel in North Carolina on a list of state-approved highways. Highway 68, which runs through Rockingham County, is one of those roads banned for twin haulers.

Stanley believes if the twin haulers bypass Rockingham County, so will new business opportunities.

"We have really been hit hard with plant closings and textiles," said Stanley. "This is our opportunity to get some business investments back in this county."

The DOT said it hopes to finalize plans by next year and start buying property for the connection in 2010.