



US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
Wilmington District

## TRIANGLE EXPRESSWAY (I-540), SOUTHEAST EXTENSION TOLL HIGHWAY, WAKE COUNTY, NC (Regulatory)

- **Project proposal to extend I-540 as a toll highway in southern and eastern Wake County, NC**
- **Current concerns are related to evaluating alternatives that would affect fewer home/business relocations and less stream/wetland impacts**
- **Corps continues to recommend evaluation of all reasonable and feasible alternatives including the Red Alternative**

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CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS: NC-04 and NC-13

DATE: 8 April 2013

### 1. PURPOSE:

To provide information regarding the proposed construction of NC Turnpike Authority's Triangle Expressway (I-540), Southeast Extension, in southern and eastern Wake County, North Carolina.

### 2. BACKGROUND:

a. The NC Turnpike Authority (NCTA) started planning studies and coordination with environmental review agencies in late 2009 on the Triangle Expressway Southeast Extension, which will extend the tolled Triangle Expressway, that is currently under construction in western Wake County, approximately 28 miles through southern and eastern Wake County, to connect to existing non-tolled I-540 in Knightdale and thereby complete the I-540 Raleigh Outer Loop.

b. NCTA is developing a draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The Southeast Extension is divided into two sets of alternatives to be studied: 1) Alternatives that start at the tolled Triangle Expressway in western Wake County and go east to I-40 ('West Alternatives'), and 2) Alternatives that connect to the West Alternatives near I-40 and continue east to connect to non-tolled I-540 in eastern Wake County ('East Alternatives'). There are three East Alternative corridors still under consideration.

c. In November 2010, NCTA showed three basic sets of West Alternatives: 1) The Red Alternative, which goes north of Lake Benson and through incorporated Garner in the northern portion of the study area; 2) The Orange Alternative, which follows the protected corridor south of Lake Benson in the central portion of the study area; and 3) Three other

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- d. West Alternatives that follow the southern portion of the study area. These Alternatives all cross Swift Creek downstream of Lake Benson, where Swift Creek has habitat for, and recent occurrences of, the Federally endangered Dwarf Wedgemussel. Two of the Alternatives go through highly developed areas near incorporated Holly Springs.
- e. In November 2010, NCTA, the Corps, and the resource agencies came to consensus to remove the three southern Alternatives. Two were dropped because of relatively high natural resource and human impacts, because they bisected a planned Wake County regional park, and had no substantial advantages over the remaining West Alternatives. It was also noted that these alternatives would not serve the transportation needs as well as some of the remaining alternatives. A third was dropped because it parallels Swift Creek with no substantial advantage over the remaining West Alternatives.
- f. In January 2011, NCTA proposed dropping the Red Alternative from further consideration, based on the number of relocations and widespread opposition in the Town of Garner. The Red Alternative has substantially fewer wetland and stream impacts, but also has a substantially higher number of relocations than the other build alternatives still being considered, based on the available information at this time. The Corps immediately sent a letter advising our concern with dropping the Red Alternative at this time in the planning process. The Corps has emphasized that we do not favor any alternative over another.
- g. In March 2011, the NC General Assembly passed legislation requiring NCTA to cease considering the Red Alternative. If NCTA does not study this alternative to the level that the Corps is satisfied, the Corps would have to review this alternative independent of NCTA.
- h. In January 2012, NCTA and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the lead Federal agency, completed a Draft Alternatives Development and Analysis Report (DADAR), which included dropping the Red Alternative, and also included additional information on Red Alternative impacts to public recreation facilities (4f). NCTA also provided the Corps with a more refined estimate of the quantity of wetlands and streams in the Red Alternative, including a simple qualitative evaluation. In February 2012, the Corps sent NCTA a letter reiterating its concerns with dropping the Red Alternative at this time.
- i. In July 2012, NCTA submitted a proposed Project Advancement Plan, which recommended refining the Purpose and Need to possibly include local plan support, and then re-screening any alternatives that had been considered.

3. **CURRENT STATUS:**

- a. The Corps completed field reviews of the detailed stream and wetland delineations done by NCTA's consultant in September 2011 for all alternatives, with the exception of the Red Alternative.

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b. In December 2012, in response to NCTA's proposed Project Advancement Plan, the Corps and FHWA sent NCTA a joint letter. Both the FHWA and Corps stated that including local plan support as a primary National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) project purpose may inappropriately limit the study of a full range of Detailed Study Alternatives. The Corps also concluded that the Red Alternative appears to be a less environmentally damaging alternative, and should be included as an alternative to be studied in the DEIS. FHWA also concluded that the North Carolina legislation restricts the location of alternative corridors prior to the engineering and environmental analysis required by NEPA, so the project process cannot satisfy all Federal environmental requirements, and FHWA intends to withdraw the Notice of Intent (NOI), meaning FHWA will no longer continue to develop the environmental impact statement and federally fund the project. FHWA also stated that NCTA may restart the project at any time by requesting a new NOI with sufficient support that all constraints have been relieved to allow compliance with NEPA.

c. In December 2012, the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, which represents Wake County towns in transportation planning, voted to ask the North Carolina legislators to repeal the legislation which restricts the Red Alternative.