

Michael F. Easley
Governor



State of North Carolina
Office of the Governor

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**GOVERNOR EASLEY ANNOUNCES ACCELERATION OF THE
WASHINGTON BYPASS IN BEAUFORT COUNTY**
U.S. 17 Bypass to be Completed Years Ahead of Schedule

WASHINGTON, N.C. -- Gov. Mike Easley today announced that the U.S. 17 Washington Bypass will be open to traffic years in advance of the initially anticipated completion date. The acceleration of the bypass, which will stretch from south of Price Road (S.R. 1149) to south of Hamilton Beach Road (S.R. 1536), is a significant milestone toward improving the entire U.S. 17 corridor throughout eastern North Carolina.

"We have made significant progress along the entire U.S. 17 corridor during the past four years," said Easley. "The Washington Bypass is a vital link in this corridor, and it will greatly improve the safety and mobility of citizens in eastern North Carolina. This bypass will also provide numerous opportunities for economic growth and development, helping build an even brighter future for the entire region."

Easley was joined at the Washington Civic Center by state Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet and Board of Transportation members Marvin Blount III, Cam McRae, Lanny Wilson, Louis Sewell and Stan White, all of whom represent the region.

"From new partnerships with our resource agencies to the creation of the Ecosystem Enhancement Program (EEP), we have made great progress in addressing the many challenges faced by projects in this region," said Tippet. "Earlier this year, I appointed a special committee of the Board of Transportation to specifically study U.S. 17. This committee has worked hand-in-hand with our staff to make today's announcement a reality, and I could not be more pleased."

The acceleration of the \$150 million bypass was made possible in part through the department's design-build program, which allows the design and construction of a project to be let as part of a single contract. This process helps the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) complete transportation projects in a much shorter time frame. Under the accelerated schedule, construction on the bypass will begin in spring 2007 with completion anticipated about 2011.

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Progress Along the U.S. 17 Corridor

Significant progress is being made on nearly all sections of the U.S. 17 corridor. Construction is currently underway on the final section of U.S. 17 between Wilmington and Holly Ridge and the two remaining sections of the Jacksonville Bypass. In addition, during the month of August, important environmental documents were signed for three sections of the corridor: the Washington Bypass, the Windsor Bypass and the stretch of U.S. 17 from Belgrade to the New Bern Bypass. Project letting for U.S. 17 from Jacksonville to Belgrade is scheduled for October 2004, and right of way acquisition for one section of U.S. 17 from Mills Street in Bridgeton to N.C. 43 will begin in December 2004.

U.S. 17 has recently been designated as a Strategic Highway Corridor under a new policy adopted by the Board of Transportation this month. The Strategic Highway Corridor policy identifies important highways in North Carolina and makes them a top priority for improvements. The study will identify the issues facing the corridor and provide support for recommended improvements.

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