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# Turnpike could harm kids, scientist says

Traffic could flow by late 2010

**BRUCE SICELOFF, Staff Writer**

Young lungs will be imperiled by a toll road planned 120 yards from a Research Triangle Park day-care center that serves 171 babies and preschoolers, an RTP scientist said Wednesday.

Gary S. Bird, father of two children at the First Environments Early Learning Center, asked the N.C. Turnpike Authority to make sure a pending study considers all the health risks of the planned Triangle Parkway.

"Noise pollution notwithstanding, exposure of these children to particulate emissions -- both during construction of the parkway and in its planned use -- is very likely to have adverse effects on their health," said Bird, 45, of Chapel Hill.

The state agency hopes in December to start designing and building the state's first modern toll roads, both in the Triangle: the 3.4-mile Triangle Parkway through RTP, and a 12.6-mile extension of Interstate 540 south from RTP to Holly Springs. The two roads could begin carrying traffic by late 2010.

Local officials have expressed concerns about toll plans, and southern Wake residents have protested in letters to the editor. But Wednesday's board meeting marked the first time the turnpike agency has heard formal statements of opposition.

The criticism came from Bird and a second speaker.

David C. McDowell, a Raleigh blogger who works as a network administrator in Cary, noted that drivers now use the northern half of I-540 without paying tolls. He said it would be unfair to treat southern Wake residents differently, or to collect tolls from low-income service workers who commute to RTP.

"I don't think they should be discriminated against," said McDowell, 31. "Why should they not also benefit from a free 540?"

**Tippett disagrees**

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## TURNPIKE TIMETABLE

Two proposed toll roads in western Wake County and Research Triangle Park -- known informally as the Triangle Turnpike -- could begin carrying traffic as soon as fall 2010.

They would be connected by a 2.8-mile segment of Interstate 540 now under construction. With the I-540 link, which also would have a tollbooth, the combined expressway would stretch for 18.8 miles. Cost estimates range from \$540 million to \$1 billion.

Studies to be completed in the next few months will produce revised forecasts for traffic counts and toll revenues, and for construction costs.

HERE'S THE TIMETABLE TURNPIKE OFFICIALS ARE HOPING FOR:

**MAY AND JULY:** Draft and final environmental reports expected.

**JUNE:** Public workshop to be scheduled for RTP road.

**SEPTEMBER:** General Assembly expected to vote on requested \$12 million -- \$18 million annual payment to cover gap between toll revenues and project costs.

**NOVEMBER:** Bond anticipation notes issued to fund purchase of remaining right-of-way.

**DECEMBER:** First contracts awarded, design work starts.

**MAY 2008:** Remaining contracts awarded, construction starts.

**SUMMER 2008:** Revenue bonds issued to fund project.

**FALL 2010:** Triangle Parkway open to traffic in RTP.

**FALL 2011:** I-540 portion open to traffic from RTP to Holly Springs.

SOURCE: NC TURNPIKE AUTHORITY  
([WWW.NCTURNPIKE.ORG](http://WWW.NCTURNPIKE.ORG))

State Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet, who leads the turnpike board, dismissed McDowell's criticism of the I-540 toll plans. "Certainly your concerns have been addressed by others," Tippet said. "We are charged with our responsibility as the turnpike authority."

Bird works as a physiologist for the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, but he said he was not speaking as an expert. He serves as president of a parent cooperative that operates the day-care center on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency campus at RTP.

He cited studies that found increased asthma and other respiratory ailments in children who live or attend school near busy highways. About 25 percent of the children at the RTP center already suffer from asthma, he said.

### Report coming soon

Robert D. Teer of Durham, an RTP developer who sits on the turnpike board, said Bird's concerns came late in the game.

"The pathway for the Triangle Parkway was reserved in 1957" before RTP was built, Teer said in an interview. "They knew it was there when they built that day-care center in the 1980s."

Steven D. DeWitt, chief engineer for the turnpike agency, said noise and air pollution effects will be considered in an environmental assessment to be completed within the next month. He said residents will be able to learn more about Triangle Parkway plans at a community workshop to be scheduled sometime in June.

Bird said he and other parents would look closely at the environmental study and then discuss its findings with turnpike officials.

"I look forward to sitting down with these chaps," he said, "and seeing what they have to say."

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