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To toll or not to toll: that could be the question

Triangle Business Journal - by [Chris Baysden](#)

RALEIGH – Local elected officials say the state should consider using federal stimulus funds to build the Triangle Expressway, which currently is on track to become North Carolina's first toll road.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation has raised the possibility of just such a shift with the compilation of a list of projects that federal stimulus money could be used to build if it becomes available. A section of the list labeled "potential major construction projects" includes two sections of the Triangle Expressway – the Western Wake Freeway and the Triangle Parkway – whose construction costs would total \$918 million, according to NCDOT.

"That is a high-priority transportation project," says Wake County Commissioner Joe Bryan. "That is the type of project that should be considered (for federal funds)."

State Sen. Neil Hunt, a Republican who represents Wake County, is leery of the future financial problems that massive federal stimulus spending might cause. But if North Carolina does get some of that money, he argues, it should be used for projects that reduce congestion.

"That's a no-brainer," says Hunt, who would put the Triangle Expressway near the top of the list of projects that should receive federal funding.

"All this stuff is a moving target," says Jim Berard, a spokesman for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. A proposal developed by that committee in mid-December would devote \$30 billion to highways and bridges nationwide, and North Carolina would get \$820 million of that total.

Even if the legislation turns out to be more generous to the Old North State, Triangle Expressway supporters still would face an uphill battle to get funding. NCDOT will try to spread the money across North Carolina and may use the state's equity formula to divide it among the department's 14 divisions. If that's the case, the Triangle's share almost certainly would fall far short of the \$1 billion needed to build the expressway.

State Sen. Richard Stevens, a Wake County Republican, is aware there would be difficulties in getting the expressway funded. But, he says, "If you don't ask, you don't get (anything)."

David Joyner, the executive director of the **North Carolina Turnpike Authority**, says, "I would be floored if these precious stimulus dollars ...were to go to something we could finance with bonds."

The authority has put into motion the issuance of bonds to pay for a toll road and has gained authority and funding from the General Assembly to move forward.



Photo c/o N.C. Turnpike Authority

David Joyner oversees state efforts to build toll roads.

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