

Belmont Banner News

Volume 74 • Issue 26 • Wednesday, July 1, 2009



50¢

Study: Parkway won't help I-85 traffic

By TARA MANJARRES

Tara@mybannernews.com

BELMONT—A new study released by the N.C. Turnpike Authority shows that traffic will increase on I-85 by the year 2030 even with the Garden Parkway, but turnpike officials say the Parkway isn't meant to eliminate the interstate's traffic.

"Its purpose is not to alleviate congestion on I-85," said Engineer Jennifer Harris of the Turnpike Authority. "The purpose is to help establish connectivity and mobility between Gaston and Mecklenburg

counties."

Harris cited the project's theme as stated on page 1-3 of the Turnpike's Environmental Impact Study released in May, at www.nc-turnpike.org.

"The purpose of the proposed action is to improve east-west transportation mobility in the area around the City of Gastonia, between Gastonia and the Charlotte metropolitan area, and particularly to establish direct access between the rapidly growing area of southeast Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County," the document reads.

In early June, the Turnpike posted a traffic study on their website showing that in the year 2030 with the Parkway completed to the first leg of U.S. 321, there would be some 137,600 cars utilizing I-85.

During the same year without the Garden Parkway, fewer cars are anticipated on I-85 at 134,600.

This caused some confusion among local residents who were expecting traffic to decrease—not increase—if the toll road is built, they said.

Dale Bingham, of Belmont, said it was his thinking all along

that the Parkway is meant to erase congestion on the clogged-up I-85.

"I think a lot of people think the reason they're going to tear up all these people's homes is that the toll road is going to stabilize the interstate (I-85)," said Bingham. "But now it looks like it really is a toll road to nowhere except back to I-85 where it's going to worsen its traffic."

But turnpike officials note the toll road is meant to connect Gaston and Mecklenburg counties and I-85's congestion isn't really part of the roadmap.

See ROAD on page 2

Road

Continued from Page 1

"It's a fact that I-85 has problems and with this project we have never maintained this is the silver bullet. This is one project, a large project, that is going to contribute substantially to maintaining the transportation mobility in this region but in no way does one project fix all the transportation needs in an area," said Harris, adding that's why

there's a long range transportation plan for the whole Gaston County area.

Harris notes the Garden Parkway's EIS clearly defines what the toll road will accomplish and suggests everyone carefully examine the document.

"I would encourage people to look at what we're saying the transportation need is and what we're saying the purpose of this project is so that people clearly understand what we are and what we aren't saying what this project is going to do in the area."