

# Legislature requests toll-road study

By **CRYSTAL BERNSTEIN**  
Staff Writer

Even though legislators do not foresee the use of toll roads to pay for the expansion of North Carolina's highways, the General Assembly has asked the N.C. Department of Transportation to investigate possible toll sites.

An \$8.6 billion, 12-year plan for highway construction and maintenance introduced in the N.C. General Assembly Monday will be paid for by an increase of 5 cents per gallon in the gasoline tax and a 2 percent fee on automobile title transfers, legislators say. Most agree a toll-road system will not be needed to fund the plan.

"According to our figures, what we have now will generate enough funds to match what our program calls for," said David Prather, special assistant for public affairs at the N.C. Department of Transportation.

Some legislators feel, however, that factors such as high interest rates on car loans, a slowdown of economic growth or an Arab oil embargo could negatively affect current propositions

for gathering funds.

"I would just like to have a little more comfort factor," said Sen. Bill Goldston, D-Rockingham. "I'm not as comfortable as I was originally (that the necessary funds will be available)." Goldston is co-chairman of the Highway Study Commission.

The Department of Transportation has been asked to study the feasibility of establishing toll roads. Though there are no plans to build toll roads, the General Assembly has asked if tolls could be implemented in the future and where the toll roads would best be located.

Toll booths cannot be constructed on highways built by federal funds, which would limit their location to new state-funded roads — unless the federal government becomes more lenient in this policy.

Five experimentation projects are being built using both federal funds and funds generated by toll roads. Half of the money necessary for the construction of these highways is being provided by the federal government, which demonstrates its changing views in the area of combining

tolls and funding, said Larry Goode, manager of program and policy at the Department of Transportation.

Goode anticipates the government will relax its position on toll roads in the 1992 Federal Highway Act, as does Rep. Bob Hunter, D-McDowell, the other co-chairman of the Highway Study Commission.

Legislators agree toll roads have their drawbacks, causing traffic congestion and costing approximately one-third of the revenue derived from tolls to administer.

"They are a very expensive way to pay for highways," Prather said.

To be effective, the toll booths must be placed in high-traffic areas and on highways that could not be easily avoided by the traveling public, Hunter said. Loops around metropolitan areas and major bridges at the coast are being considered as two possible locations for toll booths, Goode said.

As technology improves, electronic scanners can be used to determine how many times an automobile passes a particular toll site, allowing the automobile driver to be billed

monthly for tolls and eliminating the need for toll-booth staffers, Goode said.

"That would make the toll route more viable," he said.

Though the public sees toll booths as a means for making tourists and transient drivers pay for their use of N.C. highways, most citizens would be opposed to the erection of toll sites, Goode said.

The public already pays a gasoline tax and should not be forced to pay tolls, said Rep. Martin Nesbitt, D-Buncombe.

"My personal opinion is that we don't need (toll roads)," he said. "The people of this state are used to going from one place to another on good roads."

Though toll roads will probably not be implemented in the near future, it is agreed they could solve highway funding problems in the future.

"If people demand highways, you've got to pay for them. And that's just another way to pay for them," Goldston said.

## Chapel Hill Police Roundup

■ Thursday's snow did not cause Chapel Hill police many problems.

Police reports showed only a few snowball incidents. On Friday, some juveniles were throwing snowballs at a city bus on N.C. 54 at the Oaks. The youths were not located. The roof of a Jeep was also damaged by flying snow.

Icy driveways and alleys caused some personal injuries as well. A Chapel Hill man injured his ankle Saturday when he fell on an icy patch in the alley beside the Hardback Cafe. A woman broke her ankle when she fell at her residence.

No major accidents were attributed to the snow and ice.

■ Someone called 911 Sunday and reported that a sign with "Help" written on it had been placed on the mailbox of a Green Street residence. Police found a party at the home and determined the sign was a hoax.

■ Two shoplifting incidents occurred over the weekend at Roses in University Mall.

An officer saw a man leave the store Saturday carrying merchandise under his coat. When he was

stopped, he dropped the items and ran. He was later identified, and a warrant is being issued.

A Chapel Hill woman was arrested Sunday-after she was seen leaving the store with two cassette tapes.

■ A man was stopped by police Friday for erratic driving. He had no license, and he did not know the owner of the car he was driving or the last name of the person who loaned him the vehicle. William Whitted was arrested and later released to his mother.

■ Cars in the rear parking lot of University Baptist Church on Franklin Street were the target of vandals in two separate incidents this weekend.

In both incidents, police suspect a knife was used to puncture the tires of cars parked there. The total damage to the two cars was estimated at \$580.

■ Two incidents of cars driving through yards occurred Saturday, and police believe the two may be related. The first happened on Churchill Road and the second on Emory Drive. The homeowners reported no visible damage.

— compiled by Larry Stone

# Bush concludes trip, will lobby for Tower

From Associated Press reports

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — President Bush flew home Monday from five days of talks with world leaders in the Far East to wage domestic diplomacy on behalf of his embattled choice for defense secretary, John Tower.

Bush made a brief refueling stop here at Elmendorf Air Force Base before resuming the last leg of his more than 14-hour flight from Seoul, South Korea, where his visit sparked anti-American protests and violence.

Bush was resting up for a heavy day of lobbying for the Tower confirmation vote this week following

the crisis that erupted in his absence.

He was to meet at the White House with 12 Democratic senators beginning shortly after 8 a.m. Tuesday in a bid to get them to "keep an open mind" and build support for Tower, Fitzwater said.

The president's aides said they were hopeful that Tower's unusual weekend pledge to abstain from drinking alcohol if confirmed would help boost his chances.

Fitzwater said the pledge "should take care of the drinking situation" that many senators said was bothering them.

Bush is seeking to get the

Democratic-controlled Senate to confirm Tower despite the 11-9 party-line vote last week of its Armed Services Committee to reject him amid allegations of alcoholism and womanizing.

Defense was the main subject in Bush's speech earlier Monday to the National Assembly in Seoul. The president vowed to keep U.S. troops stationed there so long as they were requested by the government to

preserve stability.

On another subject, Bush voiced concerns over the U.S.-South Korea trade imbalance, both in his speech to the lawmakers and after a meeting with President Roh Tae-Woo. He suggested that South Korea do more to lower its barriers to U.S. goods.

"Korea has benefited from the U.S. open markets . . . We must expect fair access to the markets here," Bush said after the meeting with Roh.

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