

# Shallotte Aldermen Trying To Speed Up Overpass Construction

BY DOUG RUTTER

Shallotte officials are concerned that delays in building an overpass on the U.S. 17 bypass are not only threatening the safety of motorists but also stunting the town's commercial growth.

With that in mind, Mayor Sarah Tripp and four town board members traveled to Raleigh last week to meet with state transportation officials in hopes of expediting a project not scheduled for completion until 1997.

Construction of the overpass at the N.C. 130 intersection isn't expected to begin until late in the 1995 federal fiscal year, according to the state's latest draft Transportation Improvement Plan.

Town officials hope last Thursday's meeting with Garland Garrett, deputy secretary for highways with the N.C. Department of Transportation, will speed up the project.

"It's a bad situation out there that they keep delaying it for whatever reason," Alderman Carson Durham said Friday. "Every time they delay it, it has a substantial adverse effect on Shallotte."

Town officials asked the state to shorten the 18-month period set aside for acquiring right of way and start construction ahead of schedule, Durham said.

Shallotte leaders also asked the state to proceed with the relocation of Bridgers Road and voiced concern about plans to close the Southeastern Welcome Center entrance on U.S. 17, leaving only one entrance and exit off N.C. 130.

"It was well worth the trip," Durham said of the three-hour ride to Raleigh. "We at least were heard and

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Mr. Garrett will answer us. They were very cordial."

Shallotte officials and residents started pushing for an overpass on the three-year-old bypass following an accident in November 1991 that claimed the life of a local businessman and a West Brunswick High School student.

State transportation officials announced plans for the overpass in May 1992. They cited the intersection's accident history and its proximity to downtown Shallotte and the high school as the main reasons it is needed.

"If that overpass is so critical then it ought to be done. That's what I don't understand," Durham said last week.

NCDOT officials initially said construction of the overpass would begin in early 1994 and take 18 months to complete. Now, the project is about two years behind schedule.

"It's been slipping on us," said Durham, who said he was told last summer that construction would begin this October. "We just don't understand the delays, the continued delays."

Durham said the delays have been costly to the town. Investors in a motel that was planned near the intersection have backed out.

Construction of a shopping center and two fast-food restaurants near the bypass also have been post-

poned.

"They're hurting the area as far as the tax base, the capital reserve fees and the user fees," Durham said of the NCDOT.

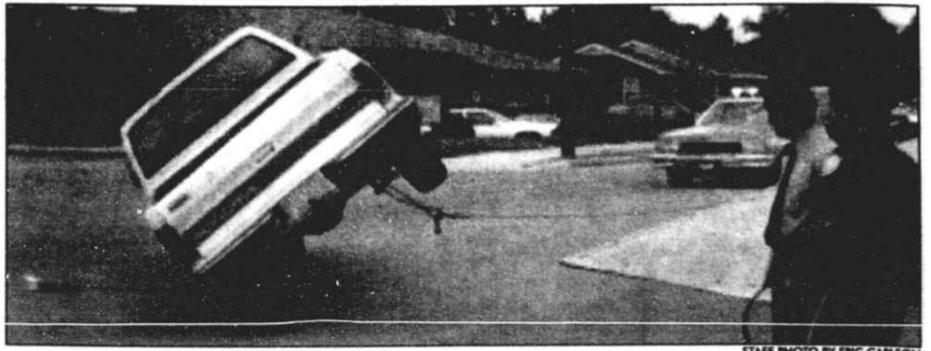
Durham said new commercial development is needed to help pay for a planned expansion of Shallotte's wastewater treatment plant. Officials have tentatively agreed to expand the treatment capacity by 200,000 gallons per day at a cost of \$1.1 million.

While in Raleigh last week, town board members met with state environmental management officials to discuss funding of the expansion. Street Lee, project manager with McKim & Creed Engineers of Wilmington, also attended the meeting.

Shallotte officials hope the town receives a low-interest loan from the State Revolving Fund to pay for the expansion.

"It looks like we stand an excellent chance if we keep our paperwork going. McKim and Creed's done an excellent job," Durham said. "They wouldn't have called and told us to come up there if it didn't look good. In their words, they expect us to get."

Durham said the loan would not be available in time to allow construction to start next January as town officials had hoped. Instead, the expansion project would have to be pushed back about six months.



STAFF PHOTO BY ERIC CARLSON

## Back On Its Feet

A pickup truck is turned upright following an accident late Tuesday morning at the intersection of Main Street and Pine Street in downtown Shallotte. The truck turned over on its left side after being struck in the rear by another vehicle that was attempting to turn from Pine onto Main. Nobody was seriously injured. At right are Deputy Keith Horne of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department and Officer Jimmy Sublett of the Shallotte Police Department. "It looked a lot worse than it actually was," Sublett said.

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