

Construction stifles major campus artery

Work to end in coming weeks

BY MARIE CROWDER
STAFF WRITER

The traffic jams and buzz of construction equipment at the intersection of Country Club Road and N.C. 54 are about to end.

But many still wonder why UNC officials scheduled the massive road construction project for the fall semester.

The construction at Country Club Road is part of a larger project to install an underground electric duct bank and chilled water piping that will service the chiller plant next to Cobb Residence Hall.

Officials often schedule campus construction projects for the summer break in order to minimize the inconvenience to students and faculty.

The delayed N.C. 54-Country Club project has reduced a major entrance to the University from five lanes to three, causing gridlock during early morning rush hour.

The original plan was to finish the construction site during the summer months, said Jerry Guerrier, UNC facility architect.

But planners instead opted to first complete a project along Cameron Road — which was in danger of extending over into the semester.

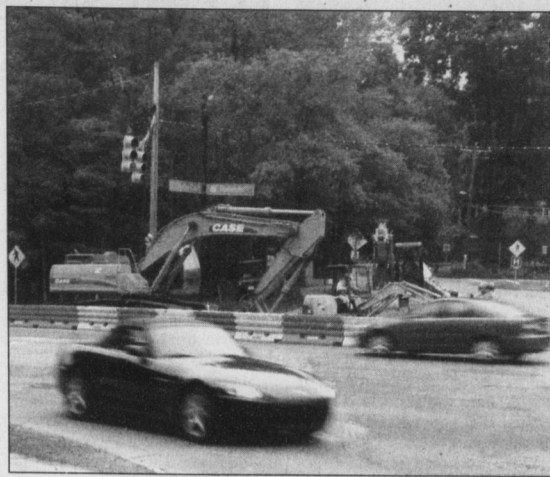
The project schedule was changed to accommodate students and campus events, such as the reopening of Memorial Hall and home football games.

Construction at Cameron Road originally was slated to take place in two phases — one in the spring and one in the fall.

Construction managers instead decided to complete the construction in one phase, finishing it by the end of August.

"Now we can stay focused on South Road and Country Club and move all construction out of Cameron," Guerrier said.

Officials told The Daily Tar Heel last week that the switch in plans required the permission of the N.C.



DTH/LAURA GRANFORTUNA

Cars drive by the clutter of construction, which officials say soon will be gone, at the intersection of Country Club Road and N.C. 54 on Tuesday.

"Now we can stay focused on South Road and Country Club and move all construction out of Cameron."

JERRY GUERRIER, UNC ARCHITECT

Department of Transportation, which affected the start of the Country Club project.

Cameron Road construction involved closing the entire road and therefore would have had more of an impact on traffic than work on the Country Club Road intersection, said Jeff Kidd, UNC's construction manager for the project.

Despite the effort, many UNC students say they are frustrated with the ongoing construction at the intersection.

"The way the lanes are blocked, it feels like you wait a lot longer," said Peter Robson, a graduate student who works in the Undergraduate Library.

"It's a pain in the butt," said Hannah Little, a third-year law student.

During the first few weeks of construction, a sidewalk closing

forced pedestrians to cross N.C. 54 to walk toward campus.

Several weeks ago a bus hit a jogger at the intersection, though no one was hurt.

"I think it was just that nobody knew what was going on," Little said, who was on the bus at the time.

Kidd said that safety was his number one concern and that all problems with crosswalks at the intersection have been remedied.

Work at Country Club Road is set to be finished within the next couple of weeks, and the entire project should be completed before the end of the year, Kidd said.

"The point to emphasize is that the project is actually ahead of schedule," Kidd said.

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

Students met with open ears

BY GEORGIA CHERRY
STAFF WRITER

Student leaders were not the only ones striking up conversation during the Office of Student Affairs open office hours Tuesday afternoon.

Since the open hours were reintroduced three weeks ago, students have been stopping by with general questions more than anything else, said Christopher Payne, associate vice chancellor for student affairs.

Payne is one of the four student affairs administrators who allot time from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. every Tuesday in Steele 104 to address questions or concerns.

"One of the values of having these office hours, and the dean of students office in general, is to help students figure out where to go with their concerns if we aren't able to fully help them here," he said.

About four or five nonstudent-leaders come by each week, an increase from the two or three that came by last year.

Winston Crisp, senior associate dean of students, stressed the importance of the hours.

"We can't really help or be help-

ful unless students continue to take advantage of this."

In addition to helping students direct their specific questions, the administrators say they are excited just to be meeting the students.

"Even if they don't have a pressing issue and they just want to get to know us, we hope they'll be stopping by," Crisp said.

"It's just a great opportunity for us to be completely accessible to students."

Student Body Vice President Adrian Johnston said the direct contact with the administrators is an asset to the student body.

"This amazing level of access can't always be found at other institutions," he said.

Johnston, along with Student Body President Seth Dearmin and Mike Brady, president of the Graduate and Professional Student Federation, met Tuesday with Margaret Jablonski, vice chancellor for student affairs, during the office hours.

They discussed a number of campus issues, including how best to present student concerns to the Board of Trustees.

Interfraternity Council President

Tom Merrihew stopped by to speak with Jablonski about the recent fraternity summit.

"She wanted to get my feedback and give me hers," Merrihew said.

Jablonski said that she also has spoken with students about voting on campus.

The office soon will start up a series of lunches with leaders of the various student organizations.

"We invite 20 or so students to lunch with the vice chancellor for open discussion of whatever issue they want to bring up," Jablonski said.

Last year, about 10 of these lunches were held.

Crisp said that the open office hours were more of an "individualized initiative" than the lunches.

All four administrators stressed that all students should take the time to stop by, not just the leaders.

"Obviously, this time is really helpful for us as student leaders," Dearmin said. "But I encourage the student body to take advantage of this opportunity and stop by. They always have good candy, too."

Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.

TTA test runs hybrid bus option

BY ERIC JOHNSON
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK — With the Triangle Transit Authority already feeling pressure from higher fuel costs, officials are considering an eventual changeover to more efficient hybrid buses.

Though the TTA is not set for another round of vehicle purchases until 2008, drivers and riders got a glimpse Tuesday of what a future hybrid fleet might look like.

The authority tested a diesel-electric bus on the route between Research Triangle Park and the RDU Airport.

"It drives real good," said Barbara McLoud, a TTA driver for seven years, as she finished her run. "I like it. It drives smooth."

Transit officials stressed that the bus won't just provide a smoother ride, but a much cleaner one. The model being used Tuesday — based on a hybrid system from Allison Transmission, a division of General Motors — would reduce emissions

by 40 percent.

"The Triangle is currently in non-compliance for its air quality," said TTA spokesman Brad Schulz. "It's important for us to find some new ways to reduce the amount of emissions that come from our vehicles."

The authority is also looking for ways to reduce the amount of fuel going into its vehicles. The buses currently in the fleet — purchased between 1998 and 2001 — get about 8 miles per gallon, Schulz said.

Higher gasoline prices are squeezing the TTA's budget, causing the authority to spend as much on fuel in the first three months of the 2005-06 fiscal year as it would normally have spent in four months.

"It is having an impact," Schulz said.

The Allison bus uses a 900-pound collection of batteries housed on the roof to propel the bus from a dead stop, with the diesel engine providing power once the vehicle is up to speed. The batteries are charged while the bus is

cruising and when it brakes.

The primary obstacle to building a hybrid fleet for the TTA likely will be the cost. The primary vehicles being used now are Thomas models that were purchased for between \$174,763 and \$189,850, depending on when they were bought.

The hybrid system reviewed Tuesday can be used on almost any bus model — with an upgrade cost of about \$200,000.

"We're really just exploring what's best for us," said Laurie Barrett, director of bus operations for TTA.

The authority is a long way from making any final decisions and will continue to review all options, she said.

Asked whether a hybrid upgrade would be cost effective, Barrett said there was no way to tell yet.

"It depends on the long run," she said. "If fuel keeps going up, then sure, it could be."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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