

Project Delays Reflected In TIP

While North Carolina will make some progress next year towards meeting critical transportation needs, a large number of road projects will be delayed under the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) adopted Dec. 6 by the State Board of Transportation.

Secretary Thomas J. Harrelson described the latest TIP as "a classic example of good news and bad news put together" because it includes many projects being built through the Highway Trust Fund but, because of a slump in automobile sales, not as many as had been hoped.

The TIP includes essentially the same projects as were in last year's program. Some have been delayed; a very few accelerated and very few new projects added.

Only one Brunswick County project was accelerated under the new TIP: a planned Northern Outer Loop that will bypass Wilmington, linking I-40 to U.S. 17 in northern Brunswick County. Construction was moved to begin in federal fiscal year 1996.

The \$11.16 million for a new bridge at Sunset Beach remains in the budget, with construction pending an "environmental document," according to the TIP. Officially, the N.C. Department of Transportation has not announced whether it plans

to appeal a recent federal court decision that determined a full environmental impact study should have been made before the state proceeded with the project nearly 10 years ago.

Work will continue on schedule on the improvement of U.S. 17 from Bell Swamp to the South Carolina state line. The 13.7-mile segment from Supply to Bell Swamp is due to be completed by the end of federal fiscal year 1992, while the 21.5-mile segment from Supply to the state line should be completed sometime in federal fiscal year 1994. The bypass itself should open to traffic in late spring 1991. A rest area/visitor information center is under construction.

Basin and bulkhead improvements at the Fort Fisher and Southport ferry docks are under construction.

Bridge replacement projects on N.C. 130, N.C. 211, N.C. 904, and five other state-maintained roads in Brunswick County are delayed in the TIP as a result of budget shortfalls. Also, resurfacing of U.S. 74-76 and widening of its shoulders from the Columbus County line to east of N.C. 87 was postponed because of its low priority status.

During the fiscal year that begins October 1991, the state plans to widen to 22 feet and resurface N.C. 133 from S.R. 1518 to S.R. 1543, a

distance of 6.3 miles. The project is expected to cost \$750,000. The state will study the feasibility of widening N.C. 211 from S.R. 1530 to S.R. 1518.

In federal fiscal year 1997 the state plans to widen Holden Beach Road to 28 feet (N.C. 130 east) the 11 miles from U.S. 17 at Shallotte to Holden Beach at an estimated cost of \$6.1 million. DOT indicates right of way and approaches are to be provided "by developer".

A second two-lane bridge to Oak Island, 3.7 miles long, is to be built, starting in federal fiscal year 1995 at an estimated cost of \$6.3 million. The entire project would be paid from state funds, with planning to begin in federal fiscal year 1991.



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Who Is This Man?

Brett Morin (left) doesn't appear to be happy about his opportunity to sit on Santa's lap, but Amy Coffey smiles for the camera before sharing her Christmas wish list with the bearded fellow in the red hat. The youngsters, from Boiling Spring Lakes, participated in the Christmas In Winnabow program Dec. 1.

State Delays Publication Of Local 'Scrooge' Lists

Concerns from newspapers regarding liability have prompted state officials to postpone publishing of lists of parents who are three months or more behind in child support payments.

The state Department of Human Resources had planned to publish the so-called "Scrooge" lists in local newspapers such as counties and towns list those who have defaulted in payment of taxes. The department had estimated the Brunswick County list could contain as many as 250 names.

However, Hugh Stevens, attorney for the N.C. Press Association, advised Human Resources Secretary David Flaherty in a Nov. 28 letter that both newspapers and the state could face potential libel suits from individuals who are listed but are not three months behind in their support payments.

The N.C.P.A. had recommended

that newspapers refuse to publish the lists, which would run in most towns as paid advertisements.

The state hasn't abandoned plans to publish the lists, only postponed them. After the state legislature convenes in January, Flaherty's department hopes to obtain legislation that would release newspapers from liability. If so, it intends to run the lists sometime during the first half of 1991.

Mary Cornish, child support enforcement supervisor with the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, said the department had planned to run its local list in next week's edition of both county newspapers, *The Brunswick Beacon* and *The State Port Pilot*.

However, at the time the state postponed the ads, the local department had begun rethinking its decision because of questions raised not

only by newspapers, but by other social services agencies, she said.

Assuring the accuracy of the list will be difficult, said Mrs. Cornish, because money is collected continuously by another agency, the courts system. In North Carolina non-support is a crime, but enforcement of the state's laws can be difficult. Hence the "Scrooge" list was one more way of trying to track absentee parents who are falling behind in payments.

However, Mrs. Cornish said there are people in prison or in the hospital who are behind on child support payments and are unable to pay and who the department thinks should not be included on the "Scrooge" list.

"When it comes, we do plan to publish it," she said. "But we are going to have to go over the list very carefully when we get it. We can't pull every file, but we know our cases pretty well."

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