

U.S.: Reopen study of TriEx Red Route or risk funding

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By: Sarah Nagem

GARNER The Federal Highway Administration has indicated that funding for the southeastern stretch of the Triangle Expressway could be in jeopardy unless the widely reviled Red Route gets a closer look.

But here's the problem: The N.C. General Assembly last year passed a law that bars the N.C. Turnpike Authority from studying the Red Route, which would run a six-lane toll road through the middle of Garner.

In a March 20 letter to the Turnpike Authority, the Highway Administration said all options for the highway, including the Red Route, have to undergo more study to comply with the National Environmental Protection Act.

The state should have further studied the traffic and noise impacts of the Red Route, its effects on homes and businesses, wetlands and other environmental factors, the letter stated.

The Highway Administration said it will pull funding for that stretch of the Triangle Expressway within 60 days unless the state conducts further environmental studies to comply with federal standards. "What we're trying to do is figure out a solution," said David Joyner, executive director of the Turnpike Authority.

Tolls collected from drivers would pay for most of the project eventually, but the state hopes for federal funding now to cover up to 80 percent of the preliminary engineering costs, estimated at \$10 million to \$12 million.

The challenge is to balance federal regulations with the 2011 state law, which bars options north of the Orange Route below Garner, Joyner said.

The Regional Transportation Alliance, a business group in Raleigh, has hired Dawson & Associates, an environmental-policy consulting firm in Washington, D.C., to consider the next steps.

"We're hoping to find a solution that works for everyone, because we've got to get this road built," Joe Milazzo, executive director for the Regional Transportation Alliance, said.