

US 17 Economic Impact Study Begins



A Smoother Ride on 17

Highway 17 stretches nearly 300 miles from South Carolina to Virginia through 13 counties in North Carolina's Coastal Plains. The highway is critical to the economic health of the region, providing access to the southern beaches, key military bases, agricultural resources, ports and industrial facilities.

The importance of the highway to North Carolina's economy has been cited by the *North Carolina Logistics Task Force*, as reported in The North Carolina Statewide Logistics Plan and the Task Force's Seven Portals Study. The following are two key issues noted in those studies that require attention:

- **Military Access** – The US 17 corridor from Jacksonville to Wilmington greatly affects Camp Lejeune, including base accessibility and operations.
- **Port Access** – US 17 is vital for accessing the Port of Wilmington; but truck access is currently limited. The Logistics Plan calls for redesigning US 17 to interstate standards and upgrading some of the port roads for improved access.

Spurred by these and other issues, significant improvements are in the immediate pipeline. The NCDOT has scheduled multiple projects to improve the capacity, safety and access management of Highway 17. Over 50 miles of US 17 will be widened, and bypasses around such areas as Washington, New Bern, Wilmington and Hampstead will be completed. In addition to the widening (primarily slated for Onslow, Jones, Craven, Beaufort and Martin Counties), several new interchanges are planned.

The Benefit of Future Investments

Beyond the currently programmed projects, additional improvements and investment to Highway 17 are needed to achieve the desired condition of safe, uninterrupted from South Carolina to Virginia. To verify the critical importance and expected benefits of improvements, as well as achieve buy-in from State and Federal decision-makers, the **Highway 17 Association** is preparing an **Economic Impact Analysis**. This analysis will look at the economic benefits of tourism, military bases and industrial access within eastern North Carolina that should result from additional Highway 17 improvements.

Economic Impact Analysis Approach

The economic impact analysis, which is being prepared by a team of experts led by Adkins North America, has been structured to accomplish the following five tasks:

1. **Transportation Analysis** – Compares the transportation need for additional highway improvements to estimated costs and suggests priorities for future improvement.
2. **Previous Studies Review** – Reviews published studies from the study corridor and other data sources on economic analysis of highway development to help to inform the analysis.
3. **Economic Impact Analysis** – Includes projections of economic activity within the highway corridor, an analysis of how that activity will spill over into the surrounding 41-county study region, and a return-on-investment analysis of the funds needed (The three categories of economic activity associated with US 17 are industrial/agricultural, tourism and military.)
4. **Stakeholders Outreach** – Involves educating and seeking input from diverse stakeholders involved in the project through public outreach and local and regional meetings
5. **Data Synthesis and Recommendations** – Provides synopsis of analyzed information from previous studies and current findings

Looking Ahead

This spring the team will be using traveler surveys to gather insight into the willingness of drivers to reroute their trips to US 17 as further improvements are made. Preliminary findings will be shared with stakeholders next fall, and a final report will be presented to the Highway 17 Association in November. The study is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2012.

“Highway 17 is a vital route for Eastern North Carolina, linking our communities and bridging our economies. We are excited about the US 17 Economic Impacts Study and working with our regional partners on furthering the vision for the future of this roadway. The findings of the Study will outline opportunities for improving US 17 as a means of encouraging economic growth...we hope our partners will continue to support our efforts as we move forward.”

~ Marc Finlayson, Highway 17 Association Executive Director