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Abstract: The article discusses issues related to two highway projects in Barrow County, Georgia. The projects are expected to cost more than \$83 million, approximately \$44 million for right-of-way and \$39 million for construction. Now, the state department of transportation is moving ahead with a plan endorsed by county officials for a route west of the city that will link Georgia Highway 211 in Winder to Georgia Highway 316 via a four-lane divided highway.

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THE ROADS AHEAD

AS BARROW COUNTY LEADERS forge ahead with their planning for future growth, there's concern about when they'll actually see work start on two major, long-discussed highway projects. One is the still-to-be-built Winder Bypass and the other is the still-to-be-improved Highway 316/University Parkway.

The bypass, seen as a way to bring relief to Barrow's traffic-clogged county seat, has been discussed, often heatedly, for a decade or more.

"Our biggest issue in Winder is traffic," says Barrow Chamber of Commerce President Tommy Jennings. "We have several state highways — and a train track — going through downtown Winder. You get all the cars and trucks coming through here when a train comes along and you've got a mess of backed-up traffic."

Over the years, bypass routes have been discussed, and discarded. Now, the state department of transportation is moving ahead with a plan endorsed by county officials for a route west of the city that will link Georgia Highway 211 in Winder to Georgia Highway 316 via a four-lane divided highway. Long-term plans also call for four-laning Georgia 211 to Interstate 85.

The project is expected to cost more than \$83 million, approximately \$44 million for right-of-way and \$39 million for construction. "It's the biggest project ever for us," says Barrow County Commission Chairman Doug Garrison.

In hopes of getting the project under way, Barrow is funding the initial engineering studies with money from its Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). Voters approved a six-year extension to the 1 percent tax in 2005 and collections started in June 2006 when the previous SPLOST expired. Even with the county's help, construction isn't scheduled to start on the project until 2012, with completion expected in 2015.

The county is also eagerly awaiting a decision on what the state is going to do with Highway 316/ University Parkway. This busy route between Atlanta and Athens has been promoted as a high technology/bioscience corridor, linking the University of Georgia with Georgia Tech and other Atlanta colleges.

Some envision a linear research and technology park stretching the entire length of University Parkway. There have also been proposals to upgrade 316 to a limited-access, interstate-quality highway, possibly even a toll road, but a final decision has yet to be made.

"A lot of developers are waiting to see what happens on 316," says David Smith, chairman of the Joint Development Authority, who points out that "most of 316 is in Barrow." —
Hobby Nesbitt

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