

# HOT lanes will improve traffic flow for all on I-77

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Charlotte is one of the fastest growing cities in the United States. In the next 20 years, our metro population will double from two to four million people. A critical challenge will be to continue to move people and product in and through our region efficiently.

It is imperative that we continue to invest in a comprehensive transportation infrastructure. That includes protecting and growing our hub airport, continuing to implement our vision for transit and land use along major corridors, and adding additional highway capacity throughout the region.

Road investments and transportation funding policy changes have been impressive in recent years. A critical new bridge on I-85 was built over the Yadkin River in record time. The final six miles of I-485 will open in two months, five years ahead of the original schedule. Additional capacity has been added to I-485 in the Ballantyne area.

In 2014, City of Charlotte voters approved \$110 million in bonds for street improvements with a whopping 70 percent in favor. In 2013, the legislature approved a funding formula for roads that takes into greater account congestion in the largest metro regions.

In an effort to bring a statewide focus to this problem, the Charlotte Chamber recently joined the North Carolina Chamber's *Coalition for a Prosperous Future*. This coalition is "proactively working to address the long-term transportation challenges in our state." A key reality is that we must look beyond traditional transportation funding sources for solutions.

That's what the State of North Carolina is doing by leading the way for improving transportation in our area through an innovative public private partnership. The I-77 Express Lanes Project is a partnership between the N.C. Department of Transportation and I-77 Mobility Partners LLC that will bring much needed long-term

road improvements and congestion relief to a major thoroughfare years sooner than public funding alone would allow.

The project will help reduce traffic congestion and improve travel time reliability on 26 miles of I-77 from the Brookshire Freeway (Exit 11) to N.C. 150 (Exit 36). There will be two managed lanes in each direction, except between Exits 28 and 36 where there will be one. The existing general purpose lanes will always remain free of charge. The managed lanes will be free to buses, motorcyclists and vehicles carrying three or more people.

Drivers who decide to pay the fee to use the express lanes will get where they are going more quickly. Those who don't want to pay don't have to and will continue to use existing lanes, benefiting from those who do. Improved traffic flow will result for all.

You can join a vigorous conversation around all this and more by attending our 2015 Transportation Infrastructure Summit on April 17. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/1BeOnEd>. I hope to see you there!

*Morgan is president of the Charlotte Chamber.*