

## **Stuck in Limbo: Beltway inaction stymies local property owners**



*A.C. Reynolds walks through a house that he uses for storage. Reynolds wants to either sell his business or to expand it, but he can do neither.*

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By Wesley Young | Journal Reporter

A.C. Reynolds Jr. wants to either expand the business on University Parkway that his family has had for more than 50 years or sell it.

But like many other property owners in the path of the planned Northern Beltway, he can do neither.

Stalled by legal action and lack of money, state officials aren't even able to help "hardship" cases, such as Reynolds, by buying their properties.

Reynolds, the owner of Reynolds Automotive, said he would like to work out a deal with beltway opponents: Drop the suit blocking the beltway, he said, but permanently cancel plans to build the western leg of the beltway -- the section that sparked all the controversy in the 1990s.

Reynolds' proposal is a sign of the frustration that some landowners feel as they wait year after year for something -- anything -- to be decided about the beltway.

When -- or if -- completed, the beltway's eastern leg would curve around the eastern side

of Winston-Salem and link U.S. 52 to U.S. 311, forming a section of Interstate 74. The western beltway would extend from U.S. 52. to U.S. 158 on the southwest side of the city.

Unlike landowners who are fighting the roadway construction, Reynolds favors the beltway. But if the state isn't going to build it, he said, he wants the freedom to do what he wants to with his property.

"I'm 60 years old," he said, after showing off old houses and trailers on his property that he uses to store parts because he can't expand.

It has been 16 years since the state approved the route of the western section of the beltway, and 13 years since the state began buying the right of way for it.

Opponents brought those land purchases to a stop in 1999 with a lawsuit that challenged the environmental-impact studies that had been done on the western leg.

State and federal officials combined the eastern and western beltway segments for a new environmental study, but opponents filed suit again in 2008 after the Federal Highway Administration approved the environmental work. By this time, state officials had shifted their focus and decided to pursue the eastern leg before the western leg of the beltway.

Although the suit remains an obstacle to the road's completion, the state has also run out of money to build it.

Sally Jones, who lives in the path of the western beltway, said she sympathizes with Reynolds' plight. But she said that Reynolds' idea of an alliance between pro- and anti-beltway advocates won't fly. She said that there are opponents to the eastern leg as well as the parts to the west.

Jones is the secretary of the N.C. Alliance for Transportation Reform, one of the two groups involved in the projects that held up road construction. The other is the Friends of Forsyth, of which Jones is also a member.

"We are all stuck," she said. "This isn't fun for anybody. Condemnation is hell." She said that for those who might want to sell, condemnation could be good because they could get money for their property. But for those who don't want to leave, she said, "you pray the thing will go away."

The money squeeze is as much of a barrier to the beltway's construction as the legal hurdles, everyone acknowledges.

Although the opponents' lawsuits have held up right-of-way purchases, the state has nonetheless bought some properties under hardship provisions. That has allowed the state to buy properties from people who are sick, for example, or properties tied up in an estate.

The N.C. Department of Transportation was set to buy Reynolds' business under hardship provisions until the state's money well ran dry, said Pat Ivey, a DOT division engineer.

"We had to shut down all right-of-way acquisitions at the end of the year," Ivey said. "There's not enough money to continue with hardship acquisitions at this time."

■ Wesley Young can be reached at 727-7369 or at [wyoung@wsjournal.com](mailto:wyoung@wsjournal.com).

