

## **Northern Beltway issue resurfaces**

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**By Wesley Young | Journal Reporter**

**County commissioners are being asked to support a resolution calling on the state to build the Northern Beltway around Winston-Salem, although money is tight and legal challenges still stand in the way.**

**Jake Cashion, the director of government affairs for the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce, told county commissioners during a briefing session last week that the beltway would create "a long-term benefit to the community."**

**However, even supporters of the beltway acknowledge that it's a tough time to be asking the state for money. Just last week, the General Assembly adjourned after passing a combination of tax increases and budget cuts to solve a financial crisis.**

**The money designated years ago to build the beltway is gone, supporters said.**

**"When the lawsuit happened, the state took our money and gave it to these other communities," Gayle Anderson, the president and chief executive officer of the chamber, said. "Now there is not as much money as there used to be and it is going to be more difficult to get the money."**

**Although they know that a resolution won't get the beltway built, supporters hope to get the issue back on the minds of legislators and state transportation officials.**

**Beltway opponent C. Robin Dean said beltway supporters are "just going through the motions," and laughed off the idea of passing a resolution.**

**"If they want to pass a resolution it is not going to make the slightest bit of difference to it," Dean said.**

**Dean is a member of Friends of Forsyth and the North Carolina Alliance for Transportation Reform Inc., two groups that filed suit in 1999 to stop construction of the western section of the beltway.**

**The suit was dismissed that same year under an agreement by state and federal officials to complete new environmental reviews and other studies before trying to proceed with the project.**

**Both citizens groups once more filed suit against the state and federal governments in 2008 after a combined review of both the eastern and western segments of the beltway was completed.**

**"The lawsuits were filed because the N.C. DOT failed to follow federally mandated**

procedures," Dean said. "They broke the law ... they are continuing to break it. They failed to follow federally mandated procedures with respect to the effects on the environment, pollution and air quality."

In the second lawsuit, opponents of the road say that the environmental-impact statement did not include and account for other projected roads such as the southern portion of the beltway and the so-called "airport connector," a road that would link Greensboro and Winston-Salem north of Kernersville.

Opponents also fault the state and federal governments for not considering how the Northern Beltway might contribute to global warming.

A federal judge recently set a Sept. 9 deadline for the state and federal governments to file legal briefs in connection with motions asking for a ruling on the case.

During discussion by county commissioners last week, Commissioner Ted Kaplan, a Democrat, found fault with legislators who, he said, had allowed beltway money to be diverted.

Commissioner Richard Linville, a Republican, said that he hasn't always supported the beltway, but that it was the lawsuits that held up the highway's construction.

Commissioner Walter Marshall agreed, and said that he was "in sympathy with the property owners" who had fought the road project.

Anderson said the chamber has made the beltway a priority for more than 20 years.

"Hopefully the judge will rule on this last lawsuit and then we have to get fighting for the funding priorities," she said. "Unfortunately, you have a small group of people determined to fight this project."

Dean said that other cities in the state are much further along with beltways because opponents "weren't willing to take them to court."

"Most people believe there is nothing you can do about governments," he said.

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