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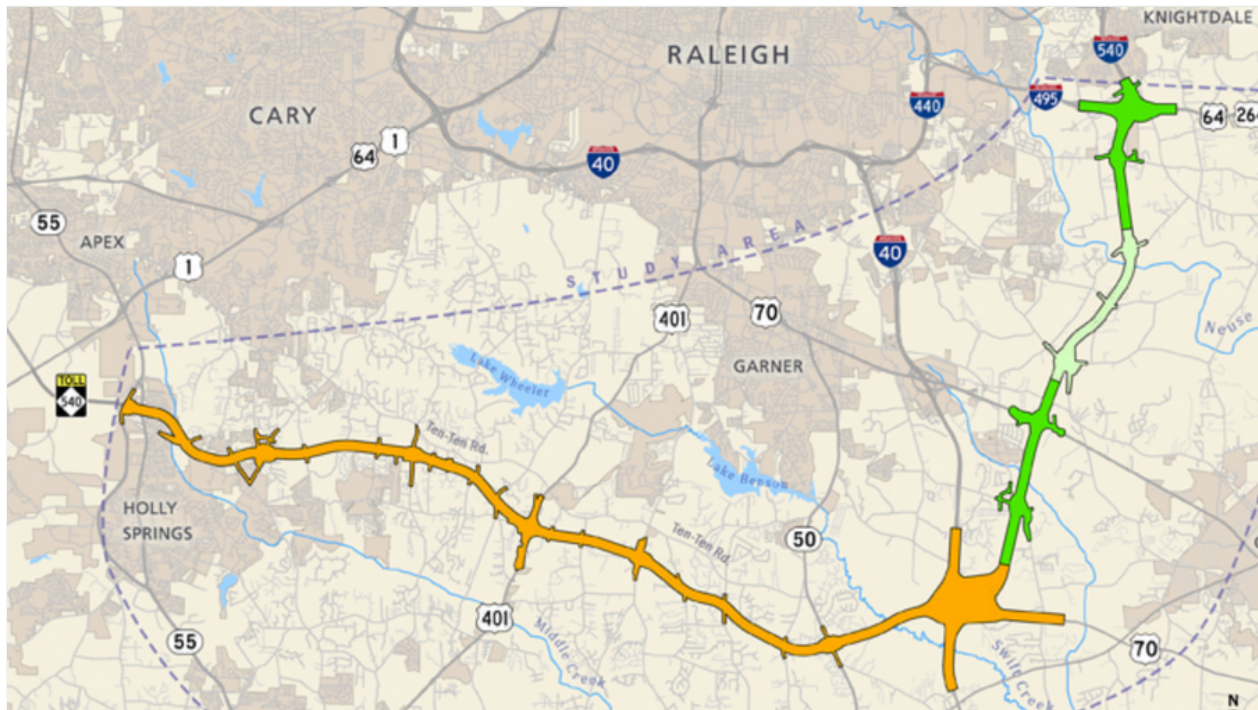
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Transportation



With \$287M contract set, here's when Complete 540 could open to traffic



A plan for the Complete 540 project. NCDOT



By **Lauren Ohnesorge** – Senior Staff Writer, Triangle Business Journal
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Complete 540, a project decades in the making, is one step closer to becoming a reality, as the final contract for the second phase of the 540 loop has been signed.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation and the North Carolina Turnpike Authority awarded the \$287 million contract to a joint venture between Branch Civil of Virginia and S.T. Wooten Corporation of Wilson. Phase 2 of Complete 540 extends the Triangle Expressway another 10 miles from Interstate 40 to Knightdale - the existing Interstate 540 at I-87/U.S. 64/U.S. 264.

Construction on the next phase could start as early as 2024 and if all timelines are met, the full loop could open to traffic in 2028. According to NCDOT, all remaining sections of the 540 loop around Raleigh are now either under construction or under contract.

That's a big deal for business, leaders and executives said Monday.



Complete 540 phases 1 and 2

NCDOT

What business leaders are saying

Sam Bratton, CEO of Wake Stone Corp., which runs a major quarry operation in Knightdale, said the project will be a game-changer. Wake Stone is supplying aggregate for part of the project, but even after the loop opens the benefits continue. He said the accessibility provided by the loop could help lower transportation spend.

“Transportation cost can be equivalent to or even greater than the cost of the product you’re selling, so any time you can lower your transportation cost, it gives you a competitive advantage,” he said.

Reid Smith runs RiverWild, one of the most active homebuilders in Johnston County. He said that in addition to business opportunity, the loop could make a difference when it comes to housing affordability.

The access it provides could “open up an area for customers who desperately need housing affordability. ... I think it’s going to make a real difference,” he said.



Sam Bratton of Wake Stone Corp.

TBJ FILE PHOTO

Joe Milazzo, executive director of the Regional Transportation Alliance, an initiative of the Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, said, “You cannot overstate the impact of completing multimodal freeway infrastructure on the success of our region, and our region’s businesses - both now and for the future of business and commerce.” “This contract ensures that there will be 28 miles of 540 opening within five years - 18 of those by next year,” Milazzo said. “Great news for the growing metropolitan Triangle.”

Chris Johnson, economic development director for Johnston County, called it the most important transportation project for the region since the completion of Interstate 40.

“This transportation connectivity for county residents and businesses to Wake and the RTP only solidifies our growing role and importance to the region,” he said Monday. “We are tremendously grateful to the NCDOT and Turnpike Authority for expediting this process.”

The second phase of the project is being built under two contracts, the first having been awarded to the Flatiron-Fred Smith Company joint venture in September for nearly \$450 million.

The \$2.5 billion project officially started construction in 2019, but has been in the works for decades. A protected corridor for the portion of 540 between the N.C. 55 Bypass in Apex and I-40 near the Johnston-Wake County line was established in 1996.