Work on highways could start next year

New ramp at U.S.25/State 11 interchange meant to improve safety

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A new type of traffic may hit State 11 and U.S. 25 by the summer of 2011.

That traffic could be construction crews who are tentatively slated to begin work on the new exit/entrance ramp and turn lanes at the U.S. 25/State 11 interchange in northern Greenville County.

Right-of-way acquisition now is underway, and the project is scheduled to be let in May, said Robert Perry, an engineer with the state Department of Transportation.

The ramp will have to cross over a few streams, requiring a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, he said.

Thus, "the letting will be driven by the permit we get from the Corps of Engineers and how long it takes for them to approve it," he said.

According to Perry, the funds for the project — $3 million for construction, $700,000 for preliminary engineering, and $500,000 to acquire right-of-way — come from the federal Department of Transportation.

The Appalachian Council of Governments adopted the project as part of its five-year plan in fall 2005, with the intersection receiving a portion of the $30 million in rural transportation improvement funds it receives for new projects in the six counties it serves.

The council and the state Department of Transportation plan to make the interchange safer by adding an exit/entrance loop on the west side of the State 11 bridge over U.S. 25.

Now there is only one exit/entrance loop for traffic trying to access either highway. All traffic now uses a combined entrance/exit ramp at the southeastern corner of the State 11 bridge over U.S. 25.

Council of Governments officials said safety and growth were the primary forces driving the project.

"In an indirect sense we did look at potential growth and projected growth in the area, meaning traffic will increase, and as it increases, the potential for accidents goes up, as well as congestion," the council's Steve Pelissier has said.

In 2005, U.S. 25 has an average daily traffic count of 12,900 vehicles near that intersection. And 1,000 of those vehicles now exit U.S. 25 onto State 11.

State 11, which is designated as a national scenic byway, saw an average of 3,100 vehicles near its connection to U.S. 25.

The 2010 traffic projection for State 11 is 3,250. That is expected to increase to 5,550 by 2030.

U.S. 25 has a 2010 traffic projection of 13,500, which could rise to 21,000 in 20 years.

An estimated 10 percent of the U.S. 25 traffic is truck traffic, Perry said.