

## TheTimesNews.com

### Cook Road extension project is under way

[Molly McGowan/Times-News](#)

2011-03-29 17:14:19



In a couple years, drivers on Cook Road will no longer have to make a set of turns onto and off of Haggard Avenue to get to University Drive.

Cook Road's two lanes are being expanded to four, and the road will be extended further north. Four bridges – a northbound and a southbound over Haggard Avenue and a northbound and a southbound over nearby railroad tracks – are also in the works, connecting the Cook Road extension to University Drive.

These N.C. Department of Transportation projects are just a couple of the many changes the Town of Elon is experiencing, said Town Manager Mike Dula. Though to the naked eye it just looks like dirt piles along University Drive, Dula said storm water pipes have already been laid and rights of way have been cleared.

Haggard Avenue still has its normal traffic pattern, said Donnie Huffines, resident engineer at NCDOT. "And it'll stay that way until we get further into construction," he said. Right now, construction consists of establishing a ramp on the side of University Drive that will tie into the southbound bridge over Haggard Avenue.

"Once we get that constructed, we can put Cook Road traffic onto that ramp, because the bridge that will be constructed will be right where the Elon Bypass (to University Drive) starts," said Huffines. Essentially, the ramp will be used to direct traffic when the intersection of University Drive and Haggard Avenue is eventually shut down.

"We've got to get traffic out of that area so we can work on the bridge over Haggard Avenue," Huffines said. The ramp will remain once the southbound Haggard Avenue bridge is completed, and will serve as its access point.

Huffines said a lot of dirt will have to be brought in when constructing the bridges due to how high they need to be, and during their construction, the DOT will also start the initial grading for the four-lane expansion on the bridge sites. Much of the dirt will be used to make the embankment that will lie between the railroad bridges and Haggard Avenue bridges.

Huffines said construction has begun and will continue throughout the summer and into the beginning of 2012. "Most of our work is seasonal, from March to November, because it involves a lot of grading," he said.

Jody Andrews, an inspector with the DOT, said as of Tuesday the dirt for the bridges and embankment had yet to be brought in. There is, however, activity on the cleared area parallel to Haggard Avenue, between the Marathon gas station and Cook Road. The "interior bent footings" of one of the railroad bridges are being installed, said Andrews, which are essentially the center supports.

Eventually, two interior supports will straddle the railroad tracks, and exterior supports will be at either end of each railroad bridge. Right now, cranes are lifting 12-by-53 foot steel beams and standing them upright

to create one of the interior supports. Andrews said there are 28 steel beams per support and they are "the sole stabilization for the footing."

Huffines said two bridges at both the railroad and Haggard Avenue "bridge points" will be necessary to handle the northbound and southbound traffic on the newly expanded four-lane road. He speculated that cost was a factor in choosing four bridges instead of two longer ones, which would have spanned both Haggard Avenue and the railroad. Huffines said the longer bridges would have required more steel and concrete, both of which are expensive building materials.

Huffines said it will take about two years to complete the lane widening and construction of the four bridges. "We're nowhere near complete," he said. "But we have started."

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