

North Carolina: Traffic up over 15 pct. in six years in Hwy. 108 corridor

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Traffic has increased substantially on Hwy. 108 between Columbus and Mill Spring in recent years, and it's probably going to get much busier. Traffic counts conducted by the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) show that traffic increased by more than 15 percent along the corridor between 1999 and 2005.

A survey done in 1999 showed an average daily traffic count of 8,000 at the western edge of Columbus, near the Milliken plant. The survey also showed an average daily count on Hwy. 108 of 5,300 about midway between Columbus and Mill Spring and 5,800 near Mill Spring.

Six years later at least a 1,000 more vehicles passed by each of those points each day. A DOT survey in 2005 showed an average daily count of 9,200 at the western edge of Columbus, 6,300 midway between Columbus and Mill Spring and 6,800 near Mill Spring.

The corridor showed one of the largest increases in traffic in the county, trailing perhaps only the increases seen in downtown Columbus. DOT shows that traffic increased on Walker Street in Columbus (near Columbus Town Hall) from an average of 5,700 vehicles per day in 1999 to 7,300 in 2005, an increase of 28 percent.

By comparison, traffic counts actually decreased at some points along Hwy. 108 between Columbus and Tryon over the same period, and traffic counts in Tryon remained relatively unchanged.

County officials say they expect further increases in traffic between Columbus and Mill Spring, particularly since much of the county's residential growth is occurring in the northern end of the county.

They say that stretch of Hwy. 108 will increasingly become a commercial corridor providing goods and services to the rapidly growing population in the northern townships. Many of those residents are moving into the large developments of Lake Adger and Bright's Creek in northwestern Polk County. Some officials have referred to that area as the "hottest spot in the county."

Lake Adger has been under development for several years, and continues to add new sections, with building proceeding steadily on the subdivision's many lots. The Bright's Creek golf course community, which plans to have about 1,250 lots, quickly sold out its first phase of 295 lots and is already selling for its second

phase.

Meanwhile, AZJ Promontory LLC has proposed the Promontory at Tryon, a large subdivision along Houston Road that may also include a golf course. Columbus officials say the developer plans about 500 lots with an entrance near the intersection of Hwy. 108 and Houston Road, just south of Mill Spring. Although the new White Oak Plantation resort and golf course community near Pea Ridge is not in the immediate area it may also affect traffic along commercial corridors near Columbus. The community is expected to have about 776 residential units and a 194-room hotel and spa near the intersection of U.S. 74 and Pea Ridge Road.

At the same time, many smaller subdivisions are either under development or have been proposed in White Oak and Coopers Gap townships. Walnut Creek Preserve along County Line Road is expected to have about 240 lots, and the county has received a conceptual plan for a 101-lot subdivision along Hwy. 9 near Lake Adger dam.

Local officials say it's crucial to consider the development boom when planning for future transportation needs. They note that previous DOT population estimates fell far short of actual growth. The Isothermal Rural Planning Organization is now working with local governments and the state to create a plan for long-range transportation needs based on expected growth.