

**Press Release** from the Southern Environmental Law Center and Black Warrior Riverkeeper  
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## **Long Range Plan for Birmingham Region Would Allocate More than Half of Available Funding for Transportation Improvements to Northern Beltline Completion of the Project Now Estimated to Take 75 Years**

*Birmingham, AL*— The Birmingham Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) draft of the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan shows that over half of available funding for new road projects for the next 25 years will be squandered on the Northern Beltline, even as that project is now slated to take more than double the time to build than originally estimated.

The long range plan presented in today’s public meeting estimates that only 19 miles (36%) of the 52-mile, \$5.4 billion Northern Beltline is projected to be complete by 2040, and that the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) plans to sink 55% of the capacity money for building or widening roads in Jefferson, Shelby, Chilton, St. Clair, Blount and Walker counties on this one project.

“This has been a wasteful project from the start,” said Sarah Stokes from the Southern Environmental Law Center. “The new draft plan shows that ALDOT has only budgeted to build a third of the entire Beltline, and at that rate, it would take approximately 75 years to build. And ALDOT’s continued diversion of limited funds to this boondoggle means that numerous needed improvements to Birmingham’s transportation system will continue to be delayed or shelved indefinitely.”

Construction continues on the first segment of the road between Highway 79 and Highway 75 in northeast Jefferson County. This 1.34-mile stretch will likely drain the remainder of the limited dedicated federal funding that had been set aside for the project over the past decade.

Given the Northern Beltline’s ballooning price tag and prolonged construction timeline, allocating the majority of available capacity money to the Beltline will now have major ramifications for other new transportation projects across Alabama, as well as much needed maintenance for area bridges and highways.

“The funding realities set forth in this new transportation plan highlight that this destructive project is not a done deal, and if actually built, will not be ready for use by anyone until nearly the next century,” said Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper. “Not only is the Beltline going to siphon most of the region’s available money away from other much-needed projects, it will do so at a high cost to our waterways with little to no traffic relief.”

The dire situation for the federal transportation budget has caused Department of Transportation officials in many states across the region, including Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee, to pull the plug on numerous road projects to account for the realities of fiscal constraints. The federal Highway Trust Fund has teetered on the edge of insolvency for most of 2014, requiring numerous stopgap measures to prevent running deficit, leaving the future of highway funding bleak at best.

After today's meeting, the public will have 21 days to [comment](#) on the greater Birmingham Regional Transportation Plan, which prioritizes projects such as bridges, new and improved roadways and safety enhancements. After committee review, the final plan will be up for adoption on January 18, 2015.

If ever finished, the Northern Beltline would cross and permanently alter Black Warrior and Cahaba river tributary streams in 90 places (including impacts to two major regional sources of drinking water). It would also impact 35 wetlands and 3,078 football fields' worth of forest.

For a map of these aquatic impacts, [click here](#).

For the Regional Planning Commission's new draft Regional Transportation Plan, [click here](#).

For the Regional Planning Commission's new draft plan map, [click here](#).

To submit comments on the Regional Transportation Plan by December 9 at 5pm CST, [click here](#).

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***About Southern Environmental Law Center:***

The Southern Environmental Law Center is a regional nonprofit using the power of the law to protect the health and environment of the Southeast (Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama). Founded in 1986, SELC's team of nearly 60 legal and policy experts represent more than 100 partner groups on issues of climate change and energy, air and water quality, forests, the coast and wetlands, transportation, and land use.

[www.SouthernEnvironment.org](http://www.SouthernEnvironment.org)

***About Black Warrior Riverkeeper:***

Black Warrior Riverkeeper's mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. We are a citizen-based nonprofit organization advocating for clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities throughout the Black Warrior River watershed. To learn more about the river and threats to it, visit:

[www.BlackWarriorRiver.org](http://www.BlackWarriorRiver.org)