

# We live – and fume – with I-77

To understand traffic here, you must first understand Interstate 77.

It's the artery that made our region possible by creating a quick commute to Charlotte, and it binds us into one community.

BUMPER  
TO BUMPER



Erica  
Beshears

But if we live by I-77, we also die by it. When a big wreck strangles the interstate, expect the alternate roads to be a mess. U.S. 21, N.C. 115, Beatties Ford Road

and Catawba Avenue are often paralyzed by the extra traffic. It's worst between exits 28 and 33 because there's only one alternate north-south road: N.C. 115.

Relief is a long way off, because the state hasn't allocated money to widen the road for years. And when it does, building a wider road across the lake



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**An endless stream of traffic travels Brawley School Road, consistently one of the busiest streets in the Lake Norman area.**

will be a difficult proposition.

What else do you need to know to understand the traffic?

■ Ah, the lake. It's beautiful, but it makes building an efficient road net-

work impossible. The tip of Brawley School Road is a stone's throw from Governors Island in Lincoln County, but

don't try driving between them in less than an hour. To cross east-west, you can choose from N.C. 73 and N.C. 150.

And drivers on Interstate 77 get to experience what we call the "lake-brake effect." Mysteriously, traffic slows to a crawl along the causeways, causing miles of stop-and-go driving. Bikini-clad boaters, daredevil personal watercraft riders and glorious sunsets have all been blamed.

■ Road improvements lag 10 to 20 years behind the growth. State government owns most of the roads around here, while local towns and counties approve the new subdivisions and retail. Some projects that are under way or soon-to-be under way: West Catawba Avenue between Torrence Chapel and Jetton roads; Brawley School Road between I-77 and Chuckwood

SEE TRAFFIC | NEXT PAGE

## Traffic

from 12

Road and N.C. 73 east of the interstate. The area is also soon to get a new interstate exit at Langtree Road.

■ Many roads on the outskirts of local towns are what's known as farm-to-market roads – two-lane roads with little shoulder. Today, the roads connect new subdivisions to markets, and some newcomers have trouble driving on them. If you run off the road to the right, slow down and ease back onto the road. Don't jerk the wheel or overcorrect; otherwise, you could end up in the left lane or a ditch on the other side of the road.

■ Our biggest roads are lined with schools, and the carpool lines affect commuters. Many parents prefer to drive their kids to school, and a lot of schools were built before carpool lines were so long. It's wise to know the bell schedules for the schools you routinely drive near.

■ The area has some public transportation. The 48X (Huntersville), 77X

(North Mecklenburg), 83X (Mooresville) and 88X (Lincoln) express buses to uptown Charlotte are lifesavers for commuters who want to read the paper or catch some extra zzz's on the way to work. In north Mecklenburg, the four Village Rider routes take residents to local shopping centers, libraries and other civic buildings. For bus schedules, visit [www.ridetransit.org](http://www.ridetransit.org).

■ More public transportation could be coming. Charlotte Area Transit System has proposed commuter rail along the Norfolk-Southern rail line that parallels N.C. 115 in most of the region. The proposed line would run from Charlotte to Iredell County, although that might depend on Iredell leaders' willingness to pay. It wouldn't be light rail, which CATS built in south Charlotte. Commuter rail is diesel-powered, oriented to longer trips and cheaper to build than light rail.

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FILE PHOTO

The 83X Mooresville CATS express bus lets commuters avoid fighting the I-77 gridlock. Other express buses in the Lake Norman area include the 48X in Huntersville, 77X in North Mecklenburg and 88X in Lincoln.