

P R E S S \* R E L E A S E  
Black Warrior Riverkeeper  
Southern Environmental Law Center

November 14, 2011

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Groups Urge Army Corps To Reject Flawed Northern Beltline Permit  
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Birmingham, AL — The Alabama Department of Transportation is attempting an end-run around federal law by pursuing permits for one section of the proposed Northern Beltline in the face of persistent questions about whether the beltline as a whole merits a multi-billion dollar investment by federal taxpayers, and while a lawsuit challenging the beltline’s environmental study is pending, two local groups say.

In detailed comments filed with the Army Corps of Engineers late Friday, the Southern Environmental Law Center and Black Warrior Riverkeeper said the project, at about \$4.7 billion, ranks as one of the most expensive highways ever built in the U.S. Further, this estimate does not include the significant cost of local road improvements, schools, fire stations, water and sewer lines, and other infrastructure that would be borne by struggling local governments—including Jefferson County—that will be necessary to support any potential sprawl development.

>> [Read the comment letter here](#)

The groups told the Corps that it is premature to issue ALDOT a “Section 404” permit under the federal Clean Water Act to build the first 3.4-mile segment of the beltline between State Routes 79 and 75 in Palmyra. ALDOT is anxious to break ground on this isolated segment of the project, which would in effect “lock in” the route of the proposed beltline, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified as the longest and most environmentally destructive of all routes considered.

“This first segment has no transportation value in and of itself,” said Sarah Stokes, SELC associate attorney. “The Corps is required by law to study the overall impacts of the entire Northern Beltline project, not just isolated segments that ALDOT wants to build one at a time. If

ALDOT is unwilling or unable to conduct the required studies, then clearly the Corps must do so before it even considers issuing the permit.”

Another flaw identified by the groups is ALDOT’s failure to consider better alternatives that would be less damaging to the environment but which could accomplish the beltline’s stated purpose of stimulating economic development and enhancing cross-regional transportation.

“The Northern Beltline will pollute our area’s streams, wetlands, and air, all of which are vital to area residents for their drinking water, recreation, fishing, and overall health. This road will not reduce traffic problems, yet ALDOT continues to pursue its development without the required studies of overall impacts or alternatives that are less damaging,” said Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

Earlier this year, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, represented by SELC, filed a lawsuit against ALDOT and the Federal Highway Administration under the National Environmental Policy Act for failing to undertake a full analysis of the indirect and cumulative impacts of the Northern Beltline and for not updating the studies when new information became available, as required by law. The groups say the lacking studies are a necessary precursor to any decision by the Corps on the permit requested by ALDOT.

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Black Warrior Riverkeeper ([www.BlackWarriorRiver.org](http://www.BlackWarriorRiver.org)) is a citizen-based nonprofit environmental advocacy organization whose mission is to protect and restore the Black Warrior River and its tributaries. A member of Waterkeeper Alliance, Black Warrior Riverkeeper was the Alabama Environmental Council’s 2007 Conservation Organization of the Year and the American Canoe Association’s 2008 Green Paddle Award winner. Nelson Brooke, Riverkeeper, won the Alabama Rivers Alliance’s 2010 River Hero Award. For more information contact Nelson Brooke: 205-458-0095.

The Southern Environmental Law Center ([www.SouthernEnvironment.org](http://www.SouthernEnvironment.org)) is a regional conservation organization 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 40 legal 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. For more information contact Sarah Stokes: 205-745-3060.