

## THIS ISLAND: RALEIGH

Within the Triangle region, Raleigh is the first large community to face a future as an island. What does this mean? Islands are characterized by limited area and easily identifiable external boundaries. Raleigh is located in the approximate center of Wake County, and similar to an island it is surrounded and constrained not by water but by eleven smaller municipalities and Falls Lake.

As the Capital City and largest municipality in the region, its significance and identity is not in jeopardy, but its ultimate area is as limited as that of an island. Unlike the next largest municipalities in the region [Durham is the only municipality in its county and Cary is less constrained to the northwest] Raleigh can run out of space. At some point this realization will demand a change in the concepts that underlie government policy, planning, and regulations, as well as their resulting activities.

Among the conceptual changes that might be anticipated are the following:

- less emphasis on expansion,
- more emphasis on infill and redevelopment including increasing density,
- greater attention to quality of life issues, and
- greater dependence upon integrated regional facilities and programs.

The transition to this new reality will be made with more or less efficiency and effectiveness. Only time will tell; but one thing is predictable: the infrastructure being created today will be the backbone for the future community.

In Raleigh as elsewhere, a community's road, sewer, water, and greenway systems are the public framework upon which cities are built. Once communities are built out, it is very difficult to expand or upgrade these systems because the needed corridors are already committed to private use. Thus, the most successful transition to an island reality will be based upon enlightened public programs that accumulate sufficient infrastructure corridors today to meet future requirements.

Of the four public infrastructure systems identified above, greenways are the only one that is not influenced by Federal and State mandates for planning, design, level of service, and operation. This can leave greenway programs at a decided disadvantage. While the satisfaction of these mandates demand the attention of responsible agency and elected decision makers, the only momentum for greenways results from public demand.

There is optimism to be found in the fact that bond referendums for greenways are consistency successful. Yet, more resources from the Federal, State, and local levels will be necessary to catch up with current greenway backlogs while addressing the effects of continuing growth. To keep pace, greenway planning, design, and construction activities must be accelerated in all local jurisdictions and regionally.

A world class greenway network is now a quality of place and quality of life requirement that is within reach in the Triangle region. Strong public support has created existing

greenway systems in the past three decades. The next couple of decades will decide Raleigh's and the region's future, as an attractive and functional island, or as just another built out urban area.