

Marietta Street improvements pushed back to fall 2010

November 29, 2009 8:55 AM

Michael Barrett

A project that will involve making several upgrades to Marietta Street in downtown Gastonia will be completed about a year behind schedule.

The delay will be a trade-off for the N.C. Department of Transportation helping to administer the stimulus funding that is paying for the streetscaping. While the timetable will be extended, the DOT's involvement will expand the scope of the project, Gastonia city engineer Rusty Bost said this month.

Gastonia received an \$850,000 grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act earlier this year. It will be used to convert a path along Marietta Street into a connector for a larger greenway system.

Plans call for one lane of the current four-lane Marietta bridge across the railroad gully to be converted into a walkway. That walkway will be extended outward past Long Avenue and Franklin Boulevard.

"It is sort of the downtown portion of what will become the greater portion of the Carolina Thread Trail," Gastonia City Manager Jim Palenick said.

The thread trail will eventually be a system of greenways and biking paths linking several counties in the Charlotte region.

City officials initially said construction would be finished by late fall. But Bost told City Council this month of plans to bring DOT into the mix, which will prevent city employees from being bogged down with paperwork that is required when administering stimulus money.

"It puts the burden of stimulus reporting and construction reporting ... on DOT," said Bost. "The city still has control over what the project is."

City Councilman Dale Burkett questioned the time extension this month.

"A one-year project shouldn't take two years," he said.

But Palenick believes the extension will be for the best. Much of the construction work will be done next spring and summer, with completion targeted for fall 2010, he said.