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Keep exits limited for new parkway

February 21, 2006

There's no point in reinventing the wheel with respect to the proposed Knoxville Regional Parkway.

In fact, we recommend moving on rather than revisiting the issue of exits - and the route - of the 26.5-mile road aimed at linking Interstate 75 in Loudon with I-75 in Anderson County near Wolf Valley Road.

Local officials have been searching for decades for a way to divert traffic from downtown Knoxville, and records show that, in 2001, the Tennessee Department of Transportation estimated that 16,800 to 31,500 vehicles a day would use the parkway.

The Knoxville Regional Parkway Design Resource Team has been trying since April 2004 to work out a route for the parkway, formerly called the Orange Route. The group has not always agreed, but the members have worked out a specific route within a 1,000-foot-wide corridor chosen by TDOT.

The group, also tasked with determining where interchanges should be, has recommended only two interchanges between Loudon and Anderson counties: one at Pellissippi Parkway and the other at Clinton Highway. The group rejected three other proposed interchanges.

Doug Horne, chairman of Horne Properties, however, spoke to the team in an attempt to convince members to add an interchange at Hickory Creek Road. Horne said the interchange would stimulate commercial development on land between Watt Road and U.S. 321.

A round of public workshops is gathering comment on the proposal before the team makes its final recommendations to TDOT. The final workshops are from 5 to 7 p.m. today at Pellissippi State Technical Community College on Hardin Valley Road for the section of the parkway in Hardin Valley and Thursday at Claxton Elementary School for the section in Claxton, Powell, Heiskell and I-75.

While we appreciate the importance of giving the public a say in the matter, we think this issue has been studied enough. It has been a long, arduous task for everything, including the members of the design resource team.

It's time to move on. The route was basically chosen by TDOT much earlier. We think the design team was wise in limiting interchanges to two between Loudon and Anderson County. The more interchanges, the less the parkway can function as it is intended.

Mike Evans, who said at last week's public hearing that he would have preferred the more westerly Blue Route, added: "Whatever they're going to do, I wish they'd do it and not leave people in limbo."

We understand his frustration. Let's shift to the next stage of the process - we don't want to find ourselves still discussing a route and exits five years from now.



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