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Residents decry proposed parkway route

By **DON JACOBS**, Jacobs@knews.com
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Eric and Karen Depew fled the traffic congestion of Middlebrook Pike in the Cedar Bluff area for the pastoral hills of Hardin Valley, plucking their home down in the middle of a 10-acre plot for privacy.

Now it seems they didn't get far enough away.

About half of the Depews' property off Buttermilk Road is in danger of becoming state right-of-way for the proposed Knoxville Regional Parkway, formerly called the Orange Route.

"It makes me angry," Eric Depew said. "It certainly doesn't serve the purpose of a bypass; it's too close in to Knoxville. I think businesses had more political pull on the road than the people did.

"To me, this is the same mistake as the 640 bypass, which is too close to the city."

Sentiments expressed by the Depews were repeated by many of the 185 people who attended a public workshop Thursday at Pellissippi State Technical Community College. The meeting was the fourth in a series hosted by the Tennessee Department of Transportation, which is gathering feedback on how best to site the road.

Few people expressed support for the 36.5-mile proposed four-lane parkway that is designed to alleviate traffic woes for downtown Knoxville. Planners hope the parkway will divert vehicles off the combined Interstate 40/75 section of road by joining I-75 in Loudon County to I-75 in Anderson County near Wolf Valley Road.

Debbie Bolton, 52, of LaFollette, hopes the proposed road will shorten her trip to work at Pellissippi State. Her 40-mile trek takes about an hour along Raccoon Valley Road, to Edgemoor Road, to Solway and then Pellissippi Parkway.

"So, yeah, I'm for it," Bolton said. But she also realizes there's a human cost involved with her future convenience.

"I work with so many people who live in Hardin Valley, and they don't like it. They feel they moved to the country and this is going to disturb that."

The Depews are like many of the impacted residents along the proposed route in that they feel financially trapped by the project.

With their life savings plowed four years ago into their home and property, they can't afford to look for a future home. And they're unsure if the state will take enough of their property to provide them the money to escape a parkway running through their 10-acre paradise.

Edgar Faust, who represents the Hardin Valley community on the Knoxville Regional Parkway Design Resource Team, said the alternative routes of the parkway within a corridor preselected by TDOT have done little to ease opposition to the project.

"They think it's coming no matter what, but they don't like it," said Faust, one of 19 representatives from local governments, businesses, developers, environmental groups and communities tasked with finalizing a design for the parkway.

"I think the governments wanted the tax base, which is fine," Faust said. "But I think in the long run it's pretty short-sighted to put it here.

"I think 25-30 years down the road people are going to be scratching their heads wondering what we did."

Comments from the 598 people who attended public workshops this month will be reviewed by the design resource team in determining the route, landscaping, elevation, speed, noise barriers and billboard rules for the parkway. Last August, about 1,300 people attended four similar meetings.

Final recommendations from the design team will be presented in February 2006 to the public in four more workshops. A finalized plan from the team should be sent to TDOT Commissioner Gerald Nicely by March 2006. TDOT could begin buying land for the project, which has no funding yet, as early as 2008, authorities said.

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