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Public pooh-poohs parkway

About 550 arrive at public meeting to peruse maps, voice support, objections

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com
August 31, 2004

Public workshop

- **Today: Karns Elementary School, 8108 Beaver Ridge Road**
- **Time: 6-8 p.m.**

About 550 people turned out Monday night to review the proposed corridor for the Knoxville Parkway, and few came as cheerleaders.

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Residents of Hardin Valley wasted no time in filling the cafeteria at Hardin Valley Elementary School to study the proposed 1,000-foot-wide corridor that follows the east side of Melton Hill Lake and the Clinch River. By the time the public meeting began at 6 p.m., 120 people already had signed in and were perusing 10-foot maps on easels and spread out on tables designed for pre-teen children.

Planners with Palmer Engineering said there were some residents who voiced support for the project. But the overwhelming consensus seemed to be that the parkway will economically benefit a few at the expense of the many families who sought the peace of a pastoral community.

"It's a nice, quiet neighborhood, and they want to put an interchange there so they can have a Weigel's and a truck stop," said an obviously disgusted Janet Baker. "My knees are weak, and I'm just sick to my stomach.

"We ought to have the meeting out in the field to see the beautiful, pastoral setting."

Baker and her husband, Don, have resided for 17 years on five acres off Hickory Creek Road. They said they could "throw rocks" at the project from their yard if it's built as proposed.

"It's tax base and commercialization, not a traffic issue," lamented Don Baker. "This is not going to solve the traffic problem."

Janet Baker said if the purpose of the proposed parkway is to move traffic from Interstate 75 in Lenoir City to I-75 near Norris in Anderson County, then why even bother with interchanges.

The road would consist of four lanes for 24.4 miles between the two connection points. Twelve miles of existing I-75 would be widened to six lanes at each end, for a total length of 36.5 miles.

Bemoaning the need for interchanges was a continuing refrain from participants at the meeting.

"Most people have said they don't want a Hardin Valley interchange, and we kind of expected that to be the biggest issue," said Don Lindeman, vice president with Palmer Engineering, a Kentucky firm hired by the Tennessee Department of Transportation to help design the parkway.

Mike Russell, TDOT project manager for the parkway, said if interchanges are omitted from the route to discourage commercial development, people must understand public safety will be impacted. Less interchanges mean fewer opportunities for emergency vehicles to get to crash victims or hazardous materials spills.

"That's something that has to be considered if you're leaving out interchanges," Russell said.

Others are concerned the parkway, which planners say could take 20 years to complete, will increase air pollution. Many participants said the path of the parkway should be moved north of Oak Ridge, where it could economically benefit Morgan and Cumberland counties.

"By the time it's completed, it's too close in," said Pauline Prosser, who lives in Brighton Farms subdivision off Hardin Valley Road. "Can't we learn from what other cities have done?"

Hickory Creek Road resident John Hendrickson, 56, wondered if the renovated weigh stations at Watt Road along I-75/40 will be obsolete because of the parkway. Russell said TDOT will have to review the potential need for truck weigh stations along the parkway.

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