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Beltway interchanges ironed out

Parkway Team agrees to exits at Pellissippi, Clinton

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com
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The Knoxville Regional Parkway Resource Team agreed Tuesday that the proposed beltway should have two interchanges - at Pellissippi Parkway and Clinton Highway.

In reaching that decision, the group rejected interchanges at Raccoon Valley Road and Oak Ridge Highway. Nine of the 15 team members agreed two interchanges along the proposed 28-mile long parkway would best serve the area.

And of the six members who didn't vote with the majority, four of them listed the option providing interchanges only at Pellissippi Parkway and Clinton Highway as their second choice.

Since April 2004 the resource team has been considering an alignment for the proposed parkway. The parkway is promoted as a way to alleviate downtown Knoxville traffic by diverting motorists off the combined Interstate 40/75 onto a beltway that joins I-75 in Loudon County with I-75 in Anderson County near Wolf Valley Road.

The resource team considered six options during the three-hour meeting Tuesday at the National Transportation Research Center. Those options included not building the parkway, adding an interchange only at Pellissippi Parkway, and different combinations of interchanges at Oak Ridge Highway, Clinton Highway and Raccoon Valley Road.

The group last year decided against a Hardin Valley Road interchange.

Two main concerns dominated the reasoning for eliminating an interchange at Oak Ridge Highway.

Resource team members worried the interchange would be too close to the Pellissippi Parkway exit, causing a congestion and safety problem. And they expressed concerns the Tennessee Department of Transportation would ignore community pleas to fix the dangerous intersection of Solway Road and Oak Ridge Highway if money was poured into an interchange at Oak Ridge Highway.

Arguments against an interchange at Raccoon Valley Road were less forceful, but still swung the group.

Tom Tucker, who represents the Solway Area Residents Association, said "public opinion is pretty much against" an interchange at Raccoon Valley Road. He and others noted Raccoon Valley Road is too narrow to handle additional traffic from the parkway.

But David Lambert, who represents Better Roads in North Knoxville, said additional traffic on the road would force the state to improve the winding road that has no shoulders. He noted emergency vehicles could access the community quicker with a parkway exit.

Mike Russell, TDOT project manager for the parkway, said planners and consultants will begin compiling options for the two proposed interchanges. The Clinton Highway interchange, which would be in Anderson County, presents a challenge because its elevation is much lower than the parkway, said Mike Agnew, TDOT assistant director of the design division.

But Russell also noted the interchange with Clinton Highway would allow TDOT the opportunity - and the federal funding - to fix the winding, hilly highway near the intersection with the parkway.

"There's still a lot of work to be done, but this was a major milestone," Russell said of the resource team's interchange decisions.

"I'm glad to see it go so smoothly. This was very promising to see the way they came together."

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