

TDOT team in Claxton to present bypass route

A new western Knoxville bypass route was first proposed more than 30 years ago and has, at times, been controversial.

In fact, the bypass route, which could run close to Oak Ridge, was one of 15 road projects put under review after Gov. Phil Bredesen came into office in 2003.

But now, after collecting citizen input, a design team helping with the project is getting ready to recommend a final route to state officials.

Tonight, members of the team, known as the Regional Parkway Design Resource Team, along with officials from the Tennessee Department of Transportation, are hosting a public workshop from 5 to 7 p.m. at Claxton Elementary School, at 2218 Clinton Highway.

At the workshop, the design team will have maps showing the actual alignment of the route, known as the Knoxville Parkway, through a 1,000-foot corridor, said Travis Brickey, TDOT spokesman. The team will also show two proposed interchanges at Pellissippi Parkway and Clinton Highway, and will collect feedback, Brickey said.

The proposed 26.5-mile parkway, also known as State Route 475, would connect the I-40/I-75 interchange southwest of Knoxville, in Loudon County, to I-75 north of Knoxville, in Knox County.

Near Oak Ridge, the route would run down Hardin Valley, cross Pellissippi Parkway near the Oak Ridge Highway and cross Clinton Highway near Bull Run Creek. It would run roughly parallel to the Oak Ridge Turnpike but on the east side of the Clinch River.

The proposed parkway, formerly known as the "Orange Route," would give I-75 drivers an alternate route, allowing them to bypass Knoxville and the I-40/I-75 corridor, which is heavily traveled by trucks.

TDOT says the bypass route would reduce travel times and improve traffic safety.

A route map of the 1,000-foot corridor is available at www.knoxvilleparkway.com/corridor_maps.php. A map of the final recommended route within that corridor should be available sometime after tonight's workshop, Brickey said.

Tonight's workshop is the last of four this month in Loudon, Knox and Anderson counties, through which the parkway would pass. Since August 2004, TDOT has held 12 public workshops on the parkway.

Brickey said the resource team in March will make a final route

recommendation to TDOT officials and Commissioner Gerald Nicely. Then, the TDOT staff and Nicely will study the recommendation and possibly make an announcement regarding the parkway in April, Brickey said.

Brickey said there is no funding for the project beyond the current process, known as Context Sensitive Solutions. The CSS process for the Knoxville Parkway includes the public workshops and the 18-member design resource team, which is made up of representatives from various communities, local governments and other organizations.

Brickey said the parkway, if built, would require the acquisition of about 1,700 acres. The parkway has, on average, about a 300-foot right-of way, he said.

Tonight's workshop is an open-house format, meaning people can come and go as they please. There will, however, be a short history presentation at 6 p.m., Brickey said.

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