

Mixed reaction for Knoxville Parkway

CLAXTON - Officials at a public workshop on Thursday said they heard mixed reactions to a proposed parkway that would link Interstate 75 in Anderson and Loudon counties, bypassing west Knoxville and coming within a few miles of Oak Ridge.

"The feedback has been all over the board," said Robert Cochran, designer in the Knoxville office of Allen and Hoshall.

More than 300 people turned out for the workshop, held Thursday night at Claxton Elementary School. At the workshop, residents could see maps of the proposed parkway, the Knoxville Parkway, as well as of two proposed interchanges at Pellissippi Parkway and Clinton Highway.

Thursday night's public workshop was the last of four this month. Others have been held in Loudon and Knox counties, and, continuing Thursday night's theme, overall reaction has been mixed, said Travis Brickey, Tennessee Department of Transportation spokesman.

The 26.5-mile parkway, also known as State Route 475, could cost \$500 million to \$600 million to build, in today's dollars, officials said. But, construction funding is not yet available, they said.

On Thursday, some people did not mince any words when asked what they thought of the proposed parkway.

"It's a crock," said Jamie Miller, whose family owns two tracts of land with about 130 acres on Wolf Valley Road along the route. They already have a nearby landfill polluting their water, and they do not want additional water runoff, Miller said.

"I feel like they can expand through Knoxville," said Sammie Epperson Jr., who could lose most of his two acres on East Wolf Valley Road.

Others at the workshop said they want more interchanges, including one at Raccoon Valley Road.

"If the road's going to come through and cross the properties, we ought to have an interchange to use the road," said Gary Sneed, a Halls resident.

Still other residents just want the project done.

"I think it's needed," said Pat Daniel, who lives on Strader Road, near Clinton Highway. But, she added, "I hope they don't take my land."

Parker Hardy, president of the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce,

said the chamber's board of directors has endorsed the route and will probably do so again when they meet on March 1.

"Our interest is to get this thing built," he said.

As proposed, the parkway, which has been in the works for decades, would begin in the south at the I-40/I-75 interchange between Knoxville and Kingston, and would end in the north at I-75, just south of Clinton. It would pass through Loudon, Knox and Anderson counties.

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.

TDOT says the proposed bypass route, formerly known as the "Orange Route," would reduce travel times and improve traffic safety.

David Lindeman, vice president of Palmer Engineering, a project consultant, said an 18-member design resource team helping with the project has had to consider a number of issues in designing the parkway route, including interchanges, air quality, noise, streams and caves.

"The resource team was very sensitive to those issues," Brickey said.

The route had to be moved in six places to avoid caves, said Harry Moore, a TDOT official who works on geotechnical engineering issues. Officials found about 25 caves along or near the route, and one contains endangered gray bats, said Luke Eggering, project manager for Parson Transportation Group.

Since August 2004, TDOT has held 12 public workshops on the parkway.

Officials said the parkway, if built as proposed, could require the acquisition of about 1,700 acres, 118 homes and 17 businesses.

The resource team is scheduled to meet again on March 29 to come up with a final recommendation.

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