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Citizen Requests Change to I-73 Route

A change could delay the project, a VDOT administrator told Henry County supervisors

By Jeff Sturgeon - 981-3251

Faced with the prospect that any change would delay Interstate 73, the Henry County Board of Supervisors tabled a request to swing the route closer to Martinsville, several industrial parks, a community college and public services.

The Virginia Department of Transportation is preparing to design the new interstate linking the Roanoke Valley and North Carolina, a piece of which will run through east Henry County.

A route change would halt such work and force more hearings and studies by the Commonwealth Transportation Board in Richmond. As framed in a two-hour meeting, the issue is whether I-73 should swing well east of Martinsville and its bypass as the board decided last month, or hug the eastern developed edge of the community as a citizen requested Tuesday.

Despite considerable past opposition to certain routes, Tuesday's meeting wasn't heated. Fewer than two dozen people came for the I-73 discussion; others were there for various items on the agenda, such as details of the Henry County budget.

When the road was the subject, Max Kendall, a former Henry County supervisor, proposed a new route to supervisors for the Martinsville-Henry County leg of the project and asked supervisors to request that the transportation board adopt the "Kendall plan."

Without an interstate running close to the community to stimulate development, "We're heading on a fast track to a ghost town," Kendall said.

But Richard Caywood, VDOT district administrator in Salem, said such a request, if approved, would delay the project and make funding harder to come by. The Commonwealth Transportation Board approved the final route in April, 10 years into the planning of the project. "Anything that's perceived as moving your project back in time is detrimental to it," Caywood said.

"This is probably now the most disruptive time to look at alignment change."

Caywood said an interstate need not bisect a community to serve as an economic catalyst. He said that I-81 supports Roanoke's economy, and Interstate 64 helps Charlottesville without passing through either city.

Kendall said after the meeting he didn't know if he'll let the matter drop.

About \$13 million is budgeted to the design phase, among other items, for I-73. The full cost of the 72-mile road is estimated at \$4.3 billion