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DILLON COUNTY HOMEOWNERS SHARPLY DIVIDED OVER I-73 PATH Zane Wilson The Sun News

DILLON

Dillon County residents are sharply divided over the path of Interstate 73 and many came to a hearing on the route Thursday night to ask highway planners to ignore the local county council.

The final preferred route for the first interstate to link to Myrtle Beach is set to cross I-95 just south of the town of Latta in Dillon County. The plan tosses out a proposal which would intersect between Dillon and Latta.

On Tuesday, the seven-member Dillon County Council unanimously passed a resolution urging the state Department of Transportation to change its plans and adopt the Dillon link.

Tom Rowland is one of the residents who came to ask DOT to leave the route alone. The chosen route spared his community of Floydale, but the path that is closer to Dillon would slash through the village.

"We don't care to have I-73 in Floydale," Rowland said. "We as a community don't want to be divided, so I came to say we like it< br> this way."

County Councilman Pee Wee Webster said the council is "not trying to hurt nobody," but believes a route closer to Dillon will benefit the whole county.

It will open a new corridor that will draw business, he said.

Webster said he knows people came to the hearing to contradict what the council wants, "but they're not getting the whole picture," he said.

Others say it is the council that isn't getting the whole picture.

State Rep. Doug Jennings, D-Bennettsville, said the Dillon County Council is missing "the big picture," which is that the chosen route benefits the whole region.

Trey McLaurin, who lives in Latta, said it's time for his area to get something that will help it economically.

Dillon usually gets the advantages when it comes to new business in the county, he said.

McLaurin's mother, Sue McLaurin, lives in a house in the historic district that I-73 will avoid by taking the more southerly path.

“I'm here to say thank you to everybody,” she said. “My grandchildren will be the 14th generation to live in that house.”

The section is one of the oldest in the region and contains houses, barns and other outbuildings, churches and graveyards built in the 1820s and 1830s.

Tom and Dorothy Bethea also live in the historic district.

“We are very, very pleased with the route they selected in Dillon County,” Dorothy Bethea said.

Vic Bethea, Clemson Extension Agent for Dillon and Marlboro counties, lives near the Temperance Hill community on land his family has owned for more than 100 years.

“It's going to take my house,” he said. “You thought you were in the country and now you are going to be in the throes of progress.”

He favors the northern route, which would not be near his property.

A small settlement near Latta also will be wiped out. Some of the residents, who got letters, came to see the maps and were shocked.

“I never thought in a million years that a highway would come through our land,” said Louise Johnson. The neighborhood is part of a farm that belonged to her great-great-grandfather, she said.

“It makes me mad,” said Lou Ann Breeden, who also lives in the neighborhood.

Jacqueline Berry, another neighbor, said she was shocked to see that she will lose her house.

“I'm not going to argue with 'em,” she said. “You can't win.”

Others say the road isn't needed.

Amanda Walters, whose family is in the restaurant business in Dillon, said the area depends on the seasonal tourist traffic that mostly travels S.C. 9, and I-73 will take that away.

The route is final, but it can be adjusted in small ways. Planners will begin working on those adjustments in late summer.

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