

First I-73 Public Hearing

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By Kelly Gillespie

Hundreds gathered in Bennettsville to listen and comment on what the Department of Transportation is calling one of the largest highway projects they've ever taken on.

"Certainly when you have a project of this magnitude people are going to be both for it and against it," said Mitchell Metts, I-73 Project Manager.

Many people, even DOT representatives said the proposed I-73 project is generating a lot of mixed emotions.

"I'm a farmer god gave us this land to work not build roads on it. You can build road, but you can't build land," said Noah Usher, Newton area resident.

Critics like Noah Usher fear that neighborhoods will become just a stretch of pavement.

"I feel sorry for my neighbors that it will tear up their homes, their property or anything else. I don't think we need it," said Usher.

Supporters like Jim Austin said a new interstate is exactly what this area needs to keep things moving.

"It will bring jobs to the area. It's probably one of the poorest counties in the entire state of South Carolina. They need the jobs," said Austin, Marlboro County resident.

I-73 representatives admit they can't please everyone, but through public hearings like Tuesday night's they give everyone the opportunity to have a voice.

Representatives said the next step in the I-73 project is evaluating all of the public comments and responding to each of them in writing.

Then the DOT will work on putting together a final environmental study.

They expect that to be finished spring of next year.