

## Interstate 73 public meeting

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More than 300 people packed Marlboro County High School Tuesday evening to get a first hand look of where the proposed Interstate 73 will run, in relation to where they live. In July, highway officials announced the middle route, cutting directly through Marlboro County, as the preferred route. Officials said that central route will have the least negative impact while also generating the most economic opportunity for the county.

Marlboro County State Representative, Doug Jennings said the interstate will provide a direct link to the Grand Strand and I-95. It will allow the movement of commerce from South Carolina's ports to the country's northern states and Canada. He announced at the public meeting that the I-73 project is the federal government's fifth highest interstate priority.

Jennings admitted that creating an easier way for out-of-state tourists to access the Grand Strand will benefit the state at-large.

"The Grand Strand is the state's economic engine, in terms of generating tax revenue," said Jennings.

Jennings stressed the interstate will not simply be a travel route for Grand Strand tourists.

"It's more than just a beach road. It's an interstate highway that will also be an economic link for these small rural counties like Marlboro, Marion and Dillon," he added.

Some Marlboro County residents don't see it that way. Alexander McGovern has lived in Marlboro County for more than 30 years and found out some troubling news at Tuesday's public meeting.

"The interstate is gonna run over me," he said. "I have 48 acres, according to the map it's gonna take it all. I figured I could retire with my wife, my grandchildren, watch the horses run back and forth, and have something for my children, my grandchildren, and now I'm going to be uprooted. Where do I go? I'm 60 years old."

Vance Edwards finds himself in that same situation.

"We're not happy about it at all," he stressed. "We built a home about 15, 16 years ago out on Academy Road thinking it was going to be our last home. Last thing on our mind was an interstate coming through our front door."

There are some who are trying to make the best of any situation. Marion Davis of Marlboro County, sees life with the proposed interstate as beneficial as life without it.

"I think we could take advantage of some of the opportunities for business and to train some people for work," Davis said. "We're gonna see some positive things if it does happen. If it doesn't happen, then we'll know that our land is protected, in a different way, but either way, we're gonna be informed and know what to do."

Officials said that nothing has been set in stone. They will consider Tuesday's public input and conduct a few more field studies before making a final decision.