

Sun News, The (Myrtle Beach, SC)
February 25, 2005
Section: FRONT
Page: A1

PRELIMINARY I-73 CORRIDOR PATHS UNVEILED

Zane Wilson The Sun News

CONWAY Preliminary possible corridors for Interstate 73 were unveiled Thursday showing it taking seven suggested paths between Interstate 95 and S.C. 22.

But planners stress these corridors, to be shown at public meetings March 8 in Dillon and March 10 in Myrtle Beach, still are preliminary.

``This is just the first cut," said Mitchell Metts, I-73 project manager for the S.C. Department of Transportation. ``We're not showing you this saying, `This is it.'"

Those at the meeting, a group of invited participants including government officials and conservation organization representatives, were mostly satisfied with the preliminary alignments.

``It's exciting," said Brad Dean, president of the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce. ``The terminus on [S.C.] 22 is great news."

By ending at S.C. 22, also known as the Conway Bypass and Veterans Highway, the I-73 project would save some time and money.

Skip Johnson, a planner with the consulting firm, said that in earlier meetings, ``we heard, `You guys would be fools not to use the Conway Bypass'; we listened."

S.C. 22 is ``a very easy fit into the interstate system" by widening its shoulders, Johnson said.

The two main alignments with smaller branches are within about a 20-mile swath between I-95 and the Conway Bypass. The longest is 45 miles, the shortest 42, Johnson said.

The refined alternative routes may vary within that 20-mile-wide path but probably will not strike out farther north or south, Johnson said.

The two major alignments track between Marion and Mullins. Marion County representatives said they are pleased with all the suggested layouts.

``Any of them will help us," said Charles Bethea of Marion County Progress, an economic-development organization.

“I'm happy to see that a lot of these alignments are along existing roads,” said Susan Libes, a professor at Coastal Carolina University who monitors water quality in the Waccamaw River watershed.

Avoiding breaking new ground for the road minimizes environmental effects, she and other representatives of environmental groups said.

Parts of the routes follow U.S. 501, S.C. 917 and S.C. 319.

State Rep. Alan Clemmons, R-Myrtle Beach, president of the S.C. I-73 Association, said the suggested routes appear to meet the transportation and economic-development goals of the road.

A major hurdle, because of environmental and cultural difficulties, is crossing the Little Pee Dee River.

One proposal is to build a new crossing slightly north of U.S. 501 to avoid the historical district at Galivants Ferry. The other would cross at S.C. 917, about 10 miles north.

Christy Holliday Douglas, a member of the Holliday family of Galivants Ferry, said the new U.S. 501 crossing would still disturb the historical area and the environment and that it makes more sense to build I-73 at the S.C. 917 crossing.

U.S. 501 already has four lanes and is heavily traveled, but the area farther north could use the road and it would avoid the historical district, she said.

Metts said the S.C. 917 crossing also has environmental problems because it would have to go through a state heritage preserve, but those are among the issues that must be balanced as plans for the road are refined.

Johnson said the next task is to do detailed aerial photography of the suggested routes.

Planners also will take into account concerns or information brought forward at the public meetings.

Metts said anyone with interest in the road should come to the meetings.

Contact ZANE WILSON at 520-0397 or zwilson@thesunnews.com.

