

Proposed Interstate 73 route prompts outcry from residents

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BENNETTSVILLE, S.C. - Some Marlboro County residents are upset about a proposed Interstate 73 route they say will cut the county and their property.

"Do you even care about heritage? It makes me sick," said Linda Covington Hooper, who cried as she told planners Tuesday the road will ruin the farm that has been in her family since colonial days.

About a dozen people urged planners at a public hearing to choose a route farther west for the interstate, which will link Michigan with South Carolina's beaches. About 200 people attended the meeting.

The preferred route for the 30 miles of the new highway from Interstate 95 north is through western Dillon County into Marlboro County, skirting just east of Bennettsville before crossing into North Carolina and meeting I-74 near Hamlet.

The state has already chosen a route to take the new freeway from I-95 southeast to Myrtle Beach. The entire road is expected to cost nearly \$2 billion in South Carolina and take 10 years to complete once construction begins.

Vance Edwards said the proposed interstate will take his house, which was specially built for the needs of his handicapped child.

"I think we need to keep this highway out of this county, keep it in North Carolina," he said.

But Mitchell Metts, the I-73 project manager for the state Department of Transportation, said the extra cost and relocating property along the western route does not favor the project.

"I'm confident we've got a very good route," Mr. Metts said.

State Rep. Doug Jennings, D-Bennettsville, a longtime supporter of the project, said the new road will mean prosperity for the area.

He said he respects the strong feelings people have for the land, but that the project has broad support in the community and is an important economic development tool for Marlboro County.

Ms. Hooper said people were displaced in years past when two state highways were widened. Those roads, she said, should be sufficient to serve the needs of tourists getting to the beaches.

"Is it necessary to chop up our county again?" she asked.