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## Residents react to I-73 plan

By Zane Wilson - The Sun News

BENNETTSVILLE --Trembling and weeping, some Marlboro County residents whose property will be taken by Interstate 73 asked at a public hearing Tuesday night that the road be moved away from them.

"Do you even care about heritage? It makes me sick," said a crying Linda Covington Hooper, who told highway planners that the road's preferred route will downgrade her family's centuries-old farm.

She was one of at least a dozen speakers who said the western route for the road should be used rather than the one that was picked, which was referred to as the central route and runs roughly between the other two that were studied.

The hearing and informational session was on the northern route of I-73 between I-95 and I-74. The southern section between S.C. 22 in Horry County and I-95 in Dillon County has already received most of its approvals and is near to receiving its construction permits.

Most of those who wanted the western route in Marlboro County own property that will be affected by I-73, but not all. John Scism has been a supporter of I-73 since it was designated in 1991 as a Michigan-to-South Carolina highway. He thinks the western route is best for the entire county.

The arguments of the relative few who want the western route are not likely to prevail, said Mitchell Metts, I-73 project manager at the S.C. Department of Transportation.

Metts said studies were made of whether the extra cost and relocations of the western route were worth the tradeoff for service to existing facilities, but the numbers did not come out in favor of that proposal.

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

State Rep. Doug Jennings, D-Bennettsville, co-chairman of the S.C. I-73 Association and a longtime backer of the project, told the 200 people who packed one side of the sticky-hot gym at Marlboro County High School that the road will give their community an opportunity for prosperity.

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

Those most affected by the proposed route don't see it that way. Hooper said her family has been farming its land since before the United States was formed.

People were disrupted in the past few years when S.C. 9 and S.C. 38 were widened, and those roads should be sufficient to serve the need, Hooper said.

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

Michael Adams shook as he spoke of the expected damage to his community.

Vance Edwards was another who does not want the road built. He said it will take his house, which was specially constructed for the needs of his handicapped child.

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

Such sentiments do not reflect the community, said others such as Charles Malloy.

"I believe this roadway will be an opportunity for Marlboro County to move into the 21st century," Malloy said.

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Preferred route impacts for the northern section between I-95 and I-74

Total length | 36.8 miles

41 relocations, 35 houses and six businesses

1,505 acres of farmland

Total length | 40.6 miles

71 relocations | 69 houses and two businesses

1,705 acres of farmland # HTMLInfoBox~~Eastern route impacts

Total length | 37.2 miles

40 relocations | 36 houses, four businesses

1,582 acres of farmland

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