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## RURAL RESIDENTS DIVIDED ON INTERSTATE'S BENEFITS

Zane Wilson The Sun News

### BENNETTSVILLE

Marlboro County residents were divided Thursday over whether Interstate 73 will help them or hurt them.

Most of the 450 people who came to a public meeting to see the three possible routes for I-73 through their county were supportive of the road but don't want it to affect their homes or lives.

"We want the highway," said Haynes Cain, whose house north of Bennettsville is spared by all the proposals. "We just don't want it in our backyard."

The S.C. Department of Transportation held the meeting to show preliminary corridors for the section of I-73 between I-95 near Dillon, and I-74 near Hamlet, N.C.

A preferred route for the section between I-95 and Myrtle Beach was presented in May.

Cain, a Bennettsville doctor, built his house near a Carolina Bay, a special type of wetland that is being protected from highway construction wherever possible.

Cain joshed about his home's safety with his friend and fellow doctor, John Nobles. Nobles' home is on one of the proposed paths.

"Do we really need the road in the first place?" Nobles said. "A lot of people have been sold on the idea that it's going to bring economic prosperity. I think all it's going to do is just move people through here faster."

The proposal that is farther west will affect fewer residents, Nobles said. The route that is farther east is too close to I-74 in North Carolina, he also said.

"I question the validity of two interstates touching each other," Nobles said.

Richard Childers and several family members learned their house in the Brightville community north of Bennettsville is in one of the proposed paths.

Family members were laughing as they talked and looked at the map, but said they were laughing only because it was better than crying.

Childers said he built his house 14 years ago and had expected to live in it the rest of his life.

“We were planning to build a pool next spring,” he said. “Not now.”

Even if the road is able to skirt his house, it will probably cut him off from his farm, forcing him to drive many miles out of the way instead of what is now a three-minute trip, Childers said.

State Rep. Doug Jennings, D-Bennettsville, is one of the backers of I-73. He fielded questions from constituents, some of them confused and upset.

Childers told Jennings that an interchange with I-73 and S.C. 79, near where he lives, would ease the pain for many residents. Jennings told him to be sure to put that on his written comments.

“You need to make that point now,” Jennings said.

One man said he moved to the area to avoid interstate highways and now he is about to have one on top of him.

Tommy O’Neal said he was concerned about one possible connection to I-95. His son lives and farms there.

“It’s got to hit somebody,” O’Neal said.

Almost a year ago, when the state Department of Transportation held a public meeting in Bennettsville on possible routes, O’Neal suggested one of those that is now a proposed path.

“It’s a ridge,” he said. “You got to follow a ridge.”

The highway must try to avoid the wetland that is so common in the region.

O’Neal said he is not against the highway but not strongly in favor of it either.

“I know it’s for Myrtle Beach,” he said. “I see minimum benefits to us.” Marlboro County Councilman Jeff Quick is an enthusiastic supporter, even though he is concerned about some of his constituents who are in the paths.

“It will be a real boost” for Marlboro, which suffers from high unemployment, Quick said. A tweak of the path farther west would save many residences, and he said he will ask for that.

“These are some good lines,” but he will ask for three interchanges at key locations in the county.

Otherwise, the road will not help Marlboro County, Quick said.

Quick asked DOT officials for one of their large maps, and they said he can have it next week.

Quick wants to take it to a county council meeting to begin work on a consensus on the routes.

Dillon County Council has asked that the preferred route be moved, but the DOT has said it will not do so.

A preferred route for the section between I-95 and I-74 should be ready in the spring, I-73 Project Manager Mitchell Metts said.

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