

Sun News, The (Myrtle Beach, SC)
May 9, 2006
Section: LOCAL
Page: C1

S.C. DOT ASKS RESIDENTS FOR INPUT ON SOUTHERN EVACUATION ROUTE Kelly Marshall Fuller The Sun News

Public comment on the Southern Evacuation Lifeline is being sought before the controversial road is built as a potential evacuation route from southern Horry County.

The first of four meetings to gather more feedback on the road, as part of an environmental study needed for the project, was held Monday at Inlet Affairs in Murrells Inlet.

At least three more meetings will be held across the Grand Strand to help measure public opinion and gather ideas on the path the road should take, said Brian Nickerson, who is working as a consultant on the project.

``We're trying to get feedback from the public," Nickerson said. ``It's just a very preliminary scoping. We're going to the public and asking about environmental concerns."

The road, which was previously known as the 701 connector, does not have a set route, said officials with the S.C. Department of Transportation.

At least \$4 million has been allocated from the federal government to do the environmental study. The S.C. General Assembly will give \$1 million for the study.

Money has not been allocated to build the road, Nickerson said.

Monday's meeting drew officials who say the road is needed for an evacuation route and others who say the stretch is a potential danger to the environment.

The road could have an effect on the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, said Nancy Cave, director of the Georgetown chapter of the Coastal Conservation League.

The Coastal Conservation League has opposed construction of the road for the past decade because of the potential of urban sprawl in undeveloped areas.

``There is not a simple answer," Cave said. ``There are problems anywhere the road will go."

Other environmental advocates oppose the road.

``I think there is a big concern about putting a road through the area designated for conservation," said David Farren, an attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center in Chapel Hill, N.C. ``I don't think any road should be built for hurricane evacuation. The priorities for the S.C. DOT are I-73 and four-laning 521 from Georgetown to I-95."

The road does have its supporters.

Howard Barnard, chairman of the Southern Life Task Force, attended Monday's meeting.

The task force, which includes residents of Horry and Georgetown counties, is trying to educate the public about the Southern Evacuation Lifeline.

``We're not destroying homes or cemeteries," Barnard said. ``We're building it because those who live on the south end [of Horry County] cannot get out before a hurricane."

Contact KELLY MARSHALL FULLER at 357-9187 or kfuller@thesunnews.com.

Copyright (c) 2006 The Sun News