

Campbellsville university Hosts Meeting To Discuss Proposed Heartland Parkway

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By Joan C. McKinney, director of public relations and marketing

CAMPBELLSVILLE, Ky. – The project was a dream of U.S. Congressman Ron Lewis, R-Ky., and its beginning took shape Thursday at Campbellsville University.

A group of interested individuals from Taylor and surrounding counties met on the university's campus to discuss a proposed "Heartland Parkway," an approximate 60-mile, four-lane highway that would connect the Louie B. Nunn Parkway (formerly the Cumberland Parkway which will eventually be I-66) to the Bluegrass Parkway.

Lewis, who was present for the initial meeting along with representatives of communities along the proposed route, said this region of Kentucky has had its share of difficulties and there had been a problem for "many, many years" of the lack of highways in the area.

He said there has been much work to get Ky. 210 open, but there needs to be more highways to attract industries.

He committed to working toward achieving the building of the parkway "especially for our children and grandchildren."

Lewis explained that he had spoken about such a road in the spring and he could not think of another place in the state that needs such a highway more.

He said he would "go after it" and there is a lot of interest in the project. He said the current Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) assures a guaranteed level of federal funds for surface transportation through fiscal year 2003, and he wants increased federal funding for high dollars to come to Kentucky.

Lewis said he is conservative in fiscal spending, but he believes infrastructure is one area that is a must. He said cities cannot build highways and airports on their own, and he urged cities to get as much gasoline tax as possible to spend for projects such as the parkway.

He said he couldn't promise a new parkway, but he would work with others at the federal level and do everything he could to make the parkway a reality.

He said he was impressed with the large number of people attending the meeting, and he was impressed with the enthusiasm and excitement of those present.

The group discussed the idea of regionalism which would assure that the different counties represented would work together to see the project work.

John Chowning, vice president for church and external affairs and executive assistant to the president of Campbellsville University, and Campbellsville Mayor Paul Osborne hosted the luncheon in the Little Auditorium on campus. Chowning told the audience that two other organizations would factor into the work of securing the parkway.

He said The Center for Rural Development in Somerset, of which he is chair, would "enhance and support" the project, and he said they have the support of the West Kentucky Corporation. There was some mention of possibly forming a "central Kentucky" economic development group as well.

Russ Mobley, representative-elect for Adair and Taylor counties, asked if the parkway would include bypasses of cities, and Chowning said it would.

Chowning said there are many good reasons for the Heartland Parkway including three institutions of higher learning, Lindsey Wilson and St. Catharine Colleges and Campbellsville University, along the route. He also said the region is in the heart of the Civil War Trails initiative.

Jodie Haydon of Nelson County, Kentucky state representative for the 50th District, said the region must "come together as a team."

Among those attending the planning meeting were the following: Bill Patterson, president of the Green County Industrial Foundation; Mayor Curtis Hardwick of Columbia; Washington County Judge/Executive John Settles; and, from Marion County, Mayor Gary Crenshaw of Lebanon, Lebanon City Administrator John Thomas and Tom Lund of the Lebanon-Marion County Industrial Development Foundation.

Campbellsville University President Michael V. Carter said the university is pleased to be able to host such dialogues and encouraged the group to hold more meetings on campus. He said access is very important to Campbellsville University as a growing university.

Others speaking included Mayor Paul Osborne, Mayor of Campbellsville; LeAnn Boling, field representative for U.S. Sen. Mitch McConnell; and Jim Askins, field representative for U.S. Sen. Jim Bunning.

A suggestion was made to have Campbellsville University students do an analysis of the economic impact of such a parkway project.

The initial meeting resulted in a task force being proposed with the mayor and judge/executive of each of the following counties appointing one person to a task force: Taylor, Green, Adair, Marion, Washington and Nelson. Kevin Sheilley, Executive Director of Team Taylor County (Campbellsville-Taylor County Industrial Development Authority, volunteered Team Taylor County staff to work on formulating the task force, and Chowning volunteered his office at the university as a clearinghouse for the project.

Chowning said the task force should meet in mid to late January to discuss their goals and formulate a strategic plan. He said legislators and their staffs, the state Department of Transportation and Gov. Paul Patton's offices must be involved in and kept advised of the work of the organization.

For more information, contact Chowning at (270) 789-5520 or Sheilley at (270) 465-9636.

Campbellsville University, founded in 1906, is a private, comprehensive institution located in South Central Kentucky. Affiliated with the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Campbellsville has an enrollment of approximately 1,600 students. The university is listed in U.S. News & World Report's "America's Best Colleges" as one of the top Southern liberal arts college, in Kaplan/Newsweek's College Catalog 2001 as a hidden treasure and a school that gives individual faculty attention and also in Money magazine's "Best Colleges" issue. Dr. Michael V. Carter is in his second year as president.