

Heartland Parkway -- Three options unveiled for 60-mile road

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By James Roberts, Staff Writer

Transportation officials unveiled three options for the proposed Heartland Parkway during a recent round of meetings with public officials.

One option would see an all-new four-lane road. A second would widen KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555 to a four lane. The third would simply add one mile passing lanes every three miles along KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555.

The proposed 60-mile parkway will connect Adair, Taylor, Marion and Washington counties by connecting the Louie B. Nunn Parkway at Columbia with the Martha Layne Collins Bluegrass Parkway at Springfield.

The first option is a "full-fledged interstate type road," according to Dan Byers, of engineering firm WMB Engineers.

The four-lane road, which would cost an estimated \$716 million, would be built about two miles to the west of KY 55/US 68/KY 555, Byers said.

Widening the existing route, option two, would cost about \$367 million. Option three, adding the passing lanes, would cost \$112 million.

"Of course, option four is to not build it at all," Ted Noe, state transportation engineer, said.

The options were unveiled in Campbellsville at a meeting two weeks ago. Campbellsville Mayor Brenda Allen, who attended the meeting, said her preference is option two. John Chowning, chairperson of the Heartland Parkway Task Force, said that most people support option two.

The parkway, coupled with planned or proposed bypasses in all four counties, would serve to solve traffic congestion problems, Allen said.

"The whole object is to alleviate traffic problems," she said.

Chowning said the bypasses, all of which were in the works before parkway talks began, and the parkway go hand-in-hand.

"The parkway obviously has to have bypasses around the towns."

According to Noe, if option two is selected, the bypasses would be four-lanes.

Regardless of the option selected, Allen said, work would likely begin in Columbia because of traffic concerns stemming from the courthouse square.

Options two and three are interchangeable, Byers said. Portions of the Parkway could be a four-lane while other portions could just add passing lanes. Both options are divided into eight segments, or phases.

Also, options two and three, when built in phases, are "immediately functional because they use the existing roadway," Byers said.

Because option one would construct a new road, the entire project must be completed before any part of it could be used. That option, Byers said, would likely be divided into three segments.

"Some people have said they were not interested in this option because of the effect it would have on communities," Byers said.

That effect would be a shift in the communities economic centers, Byers said, which would likely move to the parkway's interchanges. There would be about nine interchanges with option one.

Noe said the second round of public meetings is set to begin in about three weeks. Public input will be gathered at those meetings. Armed with input from officials and residents, engineers will make the final choice of which option to pursue for state funding.

"If possible, we try to accommodate the public," Noe said.

In July 2001, U.S. Rep. Ron Lewis secured \$500,000 in government funding to start the planning process. This paid for feasibility, preliminary, engineering and environmental studies.

Spurred by Lewis, the parkway would serve as an economic stimulus to Central Kentucky by opening up a more direct access to I-65 and I-75. In addition to increased business potential, the parkway would also provide more tourist opportunities by serving as the gateway to Green River Lake and the historic sites along the way, according to a release from the Heartland Parkway Task Force.

No funding, other than the initial \$500,000, has been allocated for the project. Funding will come from the state and federal governments.

"We are working with Congressman Lewis," Chowning said. "We're hoping and expecting to get some funding."

Chowning said the six-year highway plan, which could provide the project's funding, is still pending.