

Opinions vary about Heartland Parkway options

[The Lebanon Enterprise](#)

By Chris Hamilton

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Unlike many who attended a meeting with the Heartland Parkway Alternatives Study team Wednesday, John Wagner believes Option 1, a new highway connecting the Martha Layne Collins Blue Grass Parkway to the Louie B. Nunn Cumberland Parkway, is the best future for widespread access to Lebanon and Marion County.

Wagner and his wife, Elizabeth, have followed the topic since the Heartland Parkway first hit the "what if" drawing board. He, like many of the more than 50 people who crowded into Lebanon City Hall to learn more about the project, believes central Kentucky could use better roads.

And like each of those who asked questions or completed surveys, he has an opinion.

"What it comes down to is what do we need," he said after the meeting. "When you look at how you're going to move goods and people, there's no doubt you have to have good roads."

But whether the Heartland Parkway is a new road or an upgraded version of KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555, Wagner believes the answer is clear.

He thinks the notion that the traffic needs to come close to town, as Options 2 and 3 would have it, to bring people into the community is shortsighted.

"It really is an old-fashioned concept," he said. "As one of my neighbors said, 'You can't force people to come to Lebanon. You have to attract them ...' I hope we have a bigger vision about where we are going."

Besides, he said, Option 1 would be a mere 2 miles away, not a significant distance away from town. Plus, he said, the proposed North Lebanon Bypass would become a bottleneck along the parkway because it has been planned as a two-lane road, not a divided four-lane.

While he's not alone, Wagner is in the minority.

In the study team's last survey, 77 percent of the respondents were in favor of a reconstructed KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555. Only 8 percent were in favor of a new route.

Nearly all respondents (86 percent) were in favor of a divided four-lane although some wanted access to the road only at major interchanges.

At Wednesday's meeting, Ted Noe of the Kentucky Department of Transportation's Division of Planning said the information gathered there would be added to information that was already available. Each person was given a packet of information and a map that outlined the three options for construction of the parkway.

Option 1 would create a new road, similar to the interstate system, nearly two miles to the west of the existing route along KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555.

Option 2 would widen KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555 route into a divided four-lane road that would be designated the Heartland Parkway.

Option 3 would keep a two-lane road but passing lanes would be added every three miles on existing KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555.

Marty Marchaterre of T.H.E. Engineers, Inc. said environmental issues were taken into consideration when developing the options. He said the impact to Willisburg Lake at the northern end and Green River Lake at the southern end played a large role in the design and location, and researchers also took into consideration historical sites and cemeteries, to name a few.

John Brown of T.H.E. said researchers also looked at the "human impact" of the parkway and its options.

"We found out some interesting things about Marion County and what this would mean," he said.

Brown said researchers studied factors such as population, infrastructure and labor availability. They found that 22.5 percent of workers in Marion County commute into the community for jobs but 33 percent commute out.

The parkway would provide "economic sustainability" because the "roadway would provide access from the interstate

for trucks," Brown said.

He said that social impact was also considered such as the need for portions of some communities to not be disrupted.

Dan Byers, a consulting engineer with W.M.B. Inc., said the advantages of Options 2 and 3 were that once any work was completed, the road could be used. With Option 1, he said, half would need to be completed before it would be of any use at all.

Byers said he was not lobbying for a particular option but he pointed out that Options 2 and 3 could be piecemealed, that is, some portions of the road could be a divided four-lane, as described in Option 2, and other portions could remain two-lane with passing lanes at certain intervals, as described in Option 3.

Byers said that if Option 3 alone were chosen, then "there would be some major pavement rehab."

Some members of the audience made it clear that they supported Option 2. Monday, the Lebanon City Council approved a resolution endorsing Option 2 and the Lebanon-Marion County Chamber of Commerce voted to adopt a resolution supporting Option 2 on Thursday.

However, at Wednesday's meeting, Ken Porter, general manager of administration at TG Kentucky, said the community should not completely discount Option 1. Porter said Option 1 would be the fastest, safest route and would make people in nearby workforces consider coming to Lebanon and Marion County for employment.

"I think we need to consider every option for every reason," he said. "I don't think we want to close off Option 1 that easily."

Members of the study team have been gathering information from the public and federal, state and local agencies to discover which option people prefer.

Through its research, the team plans to identify project needs, the goals of those people who have an interest in it, environmental concerns and concerns of the public.