

Officials form parkway foundation

By James Roberts

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Construction of the Heartland Parkway is still years away, which is why community leaders in several counties have teamed together to ensure the project becomes reality.

"Because we know that this project will take a number of years to accomplish, we have set up The Heartland Parkway Foundation Inc., which is a regional nonprofit group dedicated to helping educate the public and decision makers on the importance of the project," said John Chowning, who is chair of the foundation.

The 60-mile Heartland Parkway will ultimately connect the Louie B. Nunn Parkway at Columbia with the Martha Layne Collins Bluegrass Parkway at Springfield by widening the existing KY 55/U.S. 68/KY 555 route to four lanes.

Locally, the project includes widening KY 210 from U.S. 68 to KY 3183 and widening KY 55 to five lanes from KY 1625 to U.S. 68.

The Taylor County portion of the project will use a design-build approach, allowing different phases of the project to be built simultaneously.

The Heartland Parkway Foundation formed in early 2007, though the 35-plus-member board is still being assembled, Chowning said. Once complete, the board will feature mayors, judges, economic development directors, college officials and state and U.S. representatives and senators from Adair, Taylor, Marion and Washington counties.

"With the many competitive transportation projects that are competing for funding in Kentucky and the nation, the only way that we can be competitive is to work together across county boundaries on this very important project that will provide enhanced highway safety and will help facilitate the overall economic development of Kentucky's heartland region," Chowning said.

Chowning is also vice president for church and external relations and executive assistant to the president at Campbellsville University.

Ron McMahan, executive director of Team Taylor County, said the foundation will play an important role in the Heartland Parkway project.

"Four-lane access is the only one of the four transportation modes we can change. We don't have rail and we aren't located near a port or a regional air hub. It's important for us to keep this issue in the minds of our federal and state elected officials."

Funding has been secured for preliminary engineering and environmental study of the Columbia to Campbellsville portion of the project and the proposed southern bypass around Campbellsville, Chowning said.

With funding now in place for the environmental study, the next step, he said, is to secure funding for the Campbellsville to Springfield portion of the parkway. Chowning said the indication is that funding is expected within the next few years.

"We would certainly hope so. That is our goal, to get the funding in place as soon as possible."

The environmental studies, Chowning said, are estimated to take about three years to complete.

"After both studies are complete, then funding for segments of construction will be sought."

Although completion may be years away, the parkway will be a huge advantage when recruiting businesses and industries, McMahan said.

"According to Area Development Magazine's 2006 corporate survey, highway accessibility was ranked second, right behind labor costs, as the most important site selection factor for relocating businesses."

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