

Chowning Gives C of C Update on Heartland Parkway

By [Paul B. Hayes](#) on March 22, 2007
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John Chowning, chairman of the Heartland Parkway Citizens Committee, spoke to a large crowd Tuesday afternoon at the monthly meeting of the Columbia-Adair County Chamber of Commerce, giving an update on the progress being made on the proposed new road that would connect the Louie B. Nunn Cumberland Parkway in Columbia to the Martha Layne Collins Bluegrass Parkway north of Springfield. Chowning, a vice president at Campbellsville College and chairman of Team Taylor County, has been involved in the parkway project since the beginning, and said that while strides are being made, the Heartland Parkway is still a long-range project. Chowning said that he became involved in the parkway project about six years ago when Congressman Ron Lewis (who represents Taylor, Marion and Washington counties), whom he used to work for, came to him and said this area needed a new four-lane highway. They talked about the 55/555 corridor, and Lewis said that he would make the Heartland Parkway connecting the Louie B. Nunn Cumberland and Martha Layne Collins Bluegrass parkways his number one priority for roads in his district. "So, we began what has been and will continue to be a long-term plan to connect the two parkways," Chowning said. Federal money was obtained to do preliminary studies, and an executive summary was completed in late 2005. The summary offered three options for the road: 1) build a completely new four-lane highway; 2) build a four-lane highway along the existing KY 55/555 route; and 3) improve the current KY 55/555 corridor with passing lanes. "The second alternative - a four-lane along the existing corridor - was the one we selected," Chowning explained. "We could never get a brand new four-lane built because of the cost, and passing lanes wouldn't help that much." The projected cost of the project, including the building of bypasses around Columbia, Campbellsville and Lebanon, is \$398 million, Chowning noted. Of that amount, about \$250 million would be for construction of the actual road, with the remainder for the bypasses. "The Columbia Bypass is going to become a reality shortly, and they're going to do some initial work on a southern bypass from Campbellsville that would start around Blue Hole Road (a couple of miles south of the city) and connect to KY 55 on the north side," he said. Chowning said that the study also notes that the Columbia to Campbellsville section of KY 55 should be the number one priority in building because it is the heaviest traveled. He said that Palmer Engineering has been hired to do some preliminary work on the project, including an environmental impact assessment, and this could take as long as four years. "There will be some environmental issues with this project," he said. "Especially around Green River Lake and the river itself." Chowning said that Taylor County is fully behind the parkway project, and that it also has strong support in Marion and Washington counties. The key, he said, is to keep the support strong over the long period of time needed to make it become a reality. "Realistically, how long will it take?" he asked. "I don't know, but optimistically, about 20 years." To keep interest in the project for such a long time, Chowning said that a Heartland Parkway Foundation has been formed. The purpose of the foundation is to "sustain and build support for the Heartland Parkway over the next 10 years." "It's essential to get a connector for this area," he noted. "We are poised to move significantly ahead - we have what it takes."