

Mayor speaks out as concern about private bypass through area mounts

Impacted farmers, city of Wilsonville raise issues

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By Amanda Newman

Coastal Parkway LLC, the group proposing to construct a privately-funded, tolled alternative to the Newberg-Dundee Bypass, is continuing to present its idea throughout the area that would be impacted, which could include Aurora and land near Wilsonville. So far, much of the public opinion appears to run contrary to the project.

The Coastal Parkway Committee made presentations on the project last week to the St. Paul City Council and the Marion County Board of Commissioners.

About 140 people turned out for the April 12 St. Paul meeting, said Ben Williams, president of Friends of French Prairie, a group vocal in its opposition to the project. Most of the crowd were farmers, he said, "all of whom to a person said they oppose the project and the majority of whom said they would not sell their land."

Anticipating the presentation made to the Marion County commissioners in a Thursday work session, Wilsonville mayor Tim Knapp lodged a list of concerns on behalf of the city and city council of Wilsonville.

Knapp wrote a letter to the three commissioners, saying members of the Wilsonville City Council, area residents and business owners had read media reports about the proposed parkway, which would connect to Interstate 5 south of Wilsonville.

"Like other jurisdictions of the North Willamette Valley, we are concerned about potential impacts such a roadway could have to area communities, including their residents and businesses, as well as to the local economy and to the conduct of commerce for the greater region and state," he wrote.

Knapp listed five issues of concern: increased traffic congestion on Interstate 5, adding to problem of the Boone Bridge "bottleneck," negative impacts to the French Prairie agricultural economy, the substantial public investment already put into the Newberg-Dundee Bypass, and potential environmental and water impacts.

"The French Prairie region is an area of statewide concern, containing significant environmental and water resources that produces valuable crops and various manufactured food-products and serves as critical wildlife habitat," he wrote, pointing out that French Prairie was recently included in the area designated by Portland Metro as "rural reserves," giving it protection from development for 50 years.

And Marion County has a history of opposition to a regional bypass through its land. In 2001, 2003 and 2006, the Marion County Board of Commissioners passed nearly identical resolutions stating their opposition to a regional bypass through Marion County and asking for the immediate end to consideration of such a plan. They have, however, maintained support for a Newberg-Dundee “transportation improvement project.”

Coastal Parkway spokesman Bob Youngman, of Newberg, has declined to discuss the presentations or clarify specifics of the project as of yet. He wrote in an e-mail earlier this month that the group is “still addressing the feasibility of the tollway” and “determining the design criteria which the communities would like us to follow.” No final route has been selected, he said.

A map of the project shows five potential routes, which dissect the French Prairie area and connect Highway 18 in Dayton to Interstate 5, with interchanges on Highway 219.

Route A would connect with Interstate 5 south of Broadacres Road, near Hubbard, and come near St. Paul. Route B would connect north of Broadacres Road; C would connect near Feller Road, between Hubbard and Donald; D would connect near Ehlen Road, between Donald and Aurora; and E would connect near Arndt Road, between Aurora and Wilsonville.

All routes would require a bridge to cross the Willamette River and might need to forge other small waterways across the prairie.