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Oconee County may join fight against Interstate 3

By Ray Chandler
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Oconee County officials will take a look at joining officials in Georgia and North Carolina in opposing any route of the proposed Interstate 3 that crosses their counties.

Eddie Martin, with the Opus Trust and Upstate Forever, asked council members recently to take a stand against the proposed interstate, broadly planned to connect Knoxville, Tenn., and Savannah, Ga.

“Legislative supporters of the project have said—not in writing—that if a county is opposed to (the highway) coming through it, they won’t push the route on them,” Martin said.

“Seven counties in Georgia and about eight in North Carolina are on record opposing (the highway) crossing them,” Martin said. “We’re just asking the council to stand with their brothers in Georgia and North Carolina.”

Martin said an effort to push a route from McCormick through Laurens County and south of Greenville was defeated about three months ago by just such public opposition.

Shelley Robbins, project coordinator for Upstate Forever’s Spartanburg office, outlined the scope of the proposed highway and the drawbacks if it were routed through the Upstate.

The highway would be redundant to already existing roadways, she said, and would also encourage further urban sprawl and development in a designated Heritage Corridor, through a National Forest and in prized outdoor recreation areas.

It would also, she said, jeopardize already endangered air quality.

“The Greenville and Spartanburg areas are already on the verge of non-attainment (from too high ozone levels),” she said, “and you don’t want to go there.”

Non-attainment translates into reductions in highway funds and roadblocks placed in the way of bringing in further industry for an area so designated.

Interstate 3 received \$1.32 million for study by the Federal Highway Administration in 2005. The original route went from the Savannah area through northeast Georgia to Knoxville.

Other routes for the four- to six-lane highway have included Augusta to Greenwood along U.S. 25 to

Greenville or SC 25 from Augusta to Greenwood then SC 72 to Clinton where it would connect with I-26.

The use of U.S. 25, which also runs just west of Greenville and near Travelers Rest, also raised concerns the conservationists.

To illustrate the possible dangers of ignoring the proposed interstate, Robbins pointed out that Rep. Paul Brown, (R-Ga., District 10) last year proposed an amendment to a transportation bill that would have required a study of a possible route across Upstate South Carolina.

The amendment was never offered, but followed opposition from Georgia counties to having the highway cross their borders.

“Rep. Broun wants South Carolinians to pay the price Georgia residents were not willing to pay,” Robbins said.

On the suggestion of Council member George Blanchard, the Council referred Martin’s and Robbins’ request to the council’s Real Estate and Roads Committees for further consideration.



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