

View concerns take sign out of picture

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DOT decides against electronic warning board across U.S. 25 North

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The South Carolina Transportation Commission has decided against erecting an electronic sign along the northbound lanes of U.S. 25 that some northern Greenville County residents said would have obstructed mountain views.

The commission made the decision Thursday at the urging of Johnny Edwards, the commissioner who represents Greenville/Spartanburg.

Edwards said he wanted the state Department of Transportation to move the sign location to the intersection of U.S. 25 and State 11, but the department's chief engineer told him that wouldn't provide any benefit.

"Their thought was just to take it down, so that's what we voted on, taking the sign down," Edwards said.

As originally planned, the sign would have reached over the northbound lanes of U.S. 25 about two miles north of the intersection with State

11.

DOT said it was needed to warn drivers of wet or icy road conditions along a mountainous route with steep declines and a high rate of accidents from hydroplaning.

A group of northern Greenville County residents led by County Councilman Joe Dill, however, argued that the sign would have marred spectacular views of the Blue Ridge Escarpment.

They wanted DOT to put it near the intersection with State 11, where they say drivers would have had more options to change direction in case of poor driving conditions.

Opponents said they were pleased with the outcome.

"We got what we wanted, and I think it was the right thing," said Bill Sharpe, a Cliffs Valley resident who collected 200 names on a petition asking DOT to move the sign.

Dill said he hopes DOT eventually agrees to put the sign near the intersection with State 11 as called for in

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a resolution adopted by County Council. It could be done at the same time DOT makes planned improvements to the intersection, Dill said.

"That's what I'm hoping for. That's what I'm going to be working toward," he said.

Thursday's vote also was welcomed by Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, the Greenville-based conservation group.

"We're very pleased that they are not going to install it at the proposed location, but we never questioned the need for the sign and frankly we are very surprised they are pulling the plug on the whole project and are not going to put it at Highway 11," Wyche said.

DOT spokesman Pete Poore said John Walsh, deputy secretary for engineering at DOT, felt that putting the sign near the intersection with State 11 would have sent the wrong message that State 11 was safer than U.S. 25.

DOT still plans an electronic sign along the southbound lanes of U.S. 25, just over the North Carolina line.

It will be part of a larger system that will be able to detect precipitation and automatically drop the speed limit from 55 miles per hour to 45 miles per hour when conditions are slippery.