

Local group proposes private bypass alternative

Transportation — Proposal for privately-funded, tolled road draws opposition from farmers impacted by the route

By Amanda Newman

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As estimations of when the Newberg-Dundee bypass will be finished — or even started — get pushed back, a local private entity is trying to take things into its own hands and build its own, privately-funded bypass.

Plans are still in the preliminary stages and the project is anything but certain — several local and county governments throughout the potentially affected areas are at best reluctant to support the project, while farmers whose lands could be impacted have come out in opposition. And as the project, known as the Coastal Parkway, is being proposed as a toll road, it could have a difficult time gaining acceptance from an area traditionally opposed to tolls.

At this point, details on the project are scant. A map has surfaced, showing five potential routes, which dissect the French Prairie area and connect Highway 18 near Dayton to Interstate 5, with an interchange at Highway 219.

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

Coastal Parkway LLC most often takes the face of Newberg businessman Bob Youngman and the project's lead engineer, Phil Martinson. The committee formed in late 2008 and began talking to city councils, planning commissions and land owners throughout the area last fall.

Youngman declined to comment on project specifics at this juncture, but defended the use of a toll road. He pointed to a Federal Highway Administration report on tolls, saying the thing that jumps out is that there are no toll roads in Oregon. Other states have taken full, successful advantage of that method to fund roadways that would otherwise likely not be built or maintained, he said.

The group is still addressing toll road feasibility and working with the surrounding communities to identify design criteria, he said in an e-mail. "We are focused on settling on a route which will work to help solve the area's traffic problem, which clearly will only become more critical in the years ahead."

But in October, Youngman met with the Dundee City Council and outlined the plan as it stood then. The preferred option at that point was Option A, which would connect to I-5 near Broadacres Road, outside Woodburn. It would require 300 feet of right of way, he said, and would include four lanes and 23 miles of bicycle paths. The estimated cost was \$260 million, which he said would be paid for by "economic interests" which would benefit from a direct route to Interstate 5, such as Hampton Lumber, the Oregon Trucking Association, Business Transportation Group, Evergreen Aviation and Cascade Steel.

Youngman told the council he expected it would take one to two years to obtain final permits and one to two more for construction. The road would operate as a toll road, with fees likely in the \$2.75 to \$3 range for vehicles less than 2,000 pounds and \$5 to \$6 for those heavier. The committee had met with the Oregon Department of Transportation about the project, didn't yet know if it would require an

Environmental Impact Statement and didn't expect public opposition.

On that last expectation, Youngman has already been shown wrong as Friends of French Prairie, a group which includes many of the farmers whose land would be impacted, have vocally resisted the project.

"We are adamantly opposed ... I haven't heard from a farmer yet who doesn't think this is outrageous and preposterous," said Ben Williams of Friends of French Prairie. "It will take hundreds and hundreds of acres of the best farmland in the world ... (and) unless you're a farmer that lives in the city of St. Paul or lives with immediate access of 219, it's not doing anything for anyone in French Prairie."

Williams said with interchanges only at Interstate 5 and Highways 219 and 18, the parkway would be inaccessible to most farmers in the area. He said that while he understands it would improve traffic throughout Yamhill County and on the way to the beach, it would "wreak havoc on local transportation." He also said the ecological impact to rivers, streams and wetlands was a concern.

In his meeting with the Dundee City Council, Youngman said the project would be sensitive to environmental concerns and the committee would work with the Department of Fish and Wildlife. He further explained that of the five potential routes, options B and C would likely be disregarded because of traffic issues at McKay Road and the proximity of Option C to the Willamette River and the Boon Bridge crossing. With Option A, he said, only one or two houses and couple of barns would be affected by the parkway, compared to the 180 Newberg homes estimated to fall in the proposed bypass's path.

But some think the impact to prime farmland would be even worse. Marion County planners and officials have said they would be reluctant to support a project that would primarily impact Marion County and mostly benefit Yamhill County. Williams said Friends of French Prairie will actively campaign against the project: "We plan to fight it all the way to the U.S. Department of Transportation, if necessary."

The Coastal Parkway Committee has scheduled an April 15 work session with the Marion County commissioners and hopes to enter a draft agreement with the state soon. Friends of French Prairie is circulating a petition of opposition which it hopes to deliver to the commissioners at the April 15 meeting.