

Comments on Corridor K

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Please consider this as my input to your public comment and involvement process related to the Corridor K/Highway 64 Project (TN portion) as a local resident and almost daily user of Highway 64.

I am in favor of improving the public safety and accessibility for us local users that need a safe and reliable transportation route between the east and west portions of the county and improvements for the recreation users that support the local ecotourism along and near the Ocoee Gorge. I also strongly support keeping the environmental impacts restricted to the existing corridor and preserving the intact forests and local community infrastructure adjacent to the project. In addition, as a concerned taxpayer, I would like to see a more financially modest alternative and one that does not result in two roads that would have to be designed for stability from rockslides and maintained from yet unspecified sources of funding. I believe an innovative, attractive design largely in the current location could be an additional ecotourism draw to the area and a benefit to the local economy.

To these ends, I strongly support improving the existing route of Highway 64 within the existing footprint, your option 2, but with modifications. I disagree with your general characterization of the impacts or features of the alternative. I favor a phased construction approach that will allow continued use of the existing corridor for local use during the construction/reconstruction phase. If you continue to characterize this option as having "substantial road closure and detours possible over 4-8 year construction period", you will bias against this option and any local support. I strongly request you explore creative solutions to allow continued local traffic during construction to the maximum extent possible and portray that approach to give a realistic estimate of impacts for users during construction.

Environmental impacts will be much greater with options outside the existing route. Although your Option 2 is characterized as one that would expose pyritic rock, the impacts will be confined to a largely "dead" river and will be in an area already impacted by existing cuts. We have seen over and over the impacts of road cuts to live streams. Goforth Creek, Maddens Branch, Greasy Creek or other live tributaries will be impacted by alternatives that move outside the gorge. Management Indicator Species on the Cherokee National Forest will be negatively impacted. Sensitive Species will be at high risk under options other than #2 or 2a. Habitats that are now largely intact contiguous forests will be broken up if you move out of the gorge. Options other than 2 or 2a will have substantially more impacts to habitats and the character of the landscape than staying within the existing footprint.

I would suggest you work with ARC to allow for departures from existing standards of travel speed and other considerations in order to create a draw and a resource that compliments ecotourism for the area. A modification of objectives to focus on local and recreational use compared to high speed thru traffic could yield substantial savings in project cost and allow for more effective features for recreational users

and tourist (like turn lanes, pull-offs for rafting and trailheads, and wildlife/fish passage, and vistas). The existing location of Highway 64 with realignments could provide these opportunities. I believe visionaries can take one of the first nationally designated Scenic Highways and actually make it more of an asset than it currently is.

I do not agree with your characterizing other options (outside Options 2 or 2a) as increasing recreational opportunities. The recreational uses that are “back country” (hunting, fishing, hiking, camping in solitude, and birding) will be negatively impacted. These options will be damaging the very assets people come to enjoy.

The Cherokee National Forest and its natural environment are local, regional and national assets that are in short supply in the eastern United States. Public values will be harmed by options that tend toward high speed/big footprint roads cutting through the Cherokee National Forest.

If the project results in building another road, the question of who maintains the existing Highway 64 must be addressed up front. Will poor Polk County be expected to maintain the road, finance future rock slide repairs, keep rafting access open? Will the revenue strapped state of Tennessee be saddled with the responsibility for repairs and maintenance? Will the Forest Service be looked to for this work with their budget that does not allow adequate road maintenance of their existing system? Without continued federal funding, I am concerned the route will become unusable and literally destroy the goose that lays the golden egg of tourism the county and region are trying to promote. Over 250,000 rafters used the Ocoee River this last year! Access to the multi-million dollar White Water Center might be in jeopardy if this road falls into poor repair.

Local residents like me will be directly impacted if new routes move north of the existing location. Residents of the communities of Archville and Greasy Creek and rural residents will lose values of peace, solitude, and qualities of a remote community we value and moved here for. The opposition by me and my neighbors is not a “not in my backyard” response, but is based on a genuine concern for these mountains and the local communities that will be impacted by most of your options.

I appreciate your hard work to look for options to address this difficult project and provide opportunities for input from those of us directly affected by the decisions on this project.