

# The Graham Sentinel

The Difference-The Facts

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Graham County

## Prevent the Ruin of Stecoah Valley: Find A Better Way for Corridor

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) plans to provide the public an opportunity to learn, ask questions and provide input on the U.S. 74 Relocation effort (Corridor K) in Graham County.

Four meetings will be held in the area this week, and a Nov. 30 deadline has been set for written comments.

WaysSouth, a nonprofit organization advocating responsible transportation in Southern Appalachia, has grave concerns about what is being presented in the draft study.

"Graham County citizens and anyone who values the unique character of the area

needs to pay attention to this destructive proposal," said Holly Demuth, executive director of WaysSouth. "This road will happen. It has strong political momentum. But it does not have to be a new, four-lane, interstate grade highway."

The only options on the table for the completion of Corridor K in North Carolina are a four-lane divided highway or no-build. WaysSouth is urging NCDOT to include the obvious two-lane alternative, improving critical parts of existing N.C.28 and N.C.143, a less expensive and less destructive means of improving transportation efficiency and safety, while preserving the rural character,

community, landscape, and water quality which are so important to the economic future of Graham County.

The proposed new road, a four-lane, divided, limited access highway, is not only unnecessary, unwise, outmoded and unaffordable, but it also squanders and depletes the limited funds available for much-needed infrastructure repairs of our bridges, roads and railroads.

In fact, a majority of the Graham County community views "natural beauty and outdoor tourism" as its greatest economic development strength, according to the 2009 Graham County 21st Century

Communities Situational Analysis Report, which was prepared by the North Carolina Department of Commerce.

In the Infrastructure section, the top recommendation is to "work with NCDOT to implement highway improvement projects for N.C. 28 and N.C. 143." Improvements must be made to build on the economic development strategies that are in progress, being pursued or envisioned.

"Expanding highway capacity in hopes of attracting manufacturers takes a backward-looking view of both the U.S. economy as a whole and this region in particular," said Brent Martin of The Wilderness

Society. "Manufacturing jobs have declined throughout North Carolina's western mountain counties, from 37 percent of the workforce in 1970 to 10 percent in 2007. It is not likely that a new four-lane highway will bring those jobs back, especially as fuel prices continue to climb over the coming decades."

Local resident Brian Rau, who lives in the pastoral Stecoah Valley, where the new four-lane will slice through if built, asked, "Why waste taxpayer money--\$378 million for 10 miles--on constructing a new road when the current route meets NCDOT's projected traffic needs through at least 2030?"

"Few works of more drastic and impact on the land does a new major highway at a new site location, Joe McDonald, president of North Carolina Appalachian Transportation Reform, character and the area surrounding counties changed forever. Future generations will not be able to bring back the wildlife habitats or areas that have been and lost.

"Therefore, when it comes to transportation planning, it is absolutely essential to make the right decisions. See STECOAH o

along the way. Politics and greed should not be allowed to influence these decisions.

"To those who say that this new road should be built for economic progress, I would answer that if the road is going to be environmentally destructive and is actually not needed, we would be better off, as has been said before, to pay people to dig holes and then cover them back up again."

Citizens have a time-sensitive opportunity to stop this spoilage and advocate for the

two-lane substitute: a less destructive, less polluting, and much less expensive alternative that has not been considered by NCDOT.

For more information about the meetings and submitting written comments, visit NCDOT's Web site: <http://www.ncdot.gov/projects/US74Relocation/>.

For "Ten Key Questions to ask the DOT" and additional information on Corridor K, visit [www.CorridorK.org](http://www.CorridorK.org). WaysSouth representatives will

be at each meeting with information as well.

"Decisions will be made soon," said Demuth. "NCDOT needs to hear from individuals loud and clear that the wise investment in Graham County's infrastructure and economic future lies within preserving the integrity of the area and improving existing roads, not permanently scarring the landscape and communities with a four-lane Corridor K."