

POLK COUNTY
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Dear Editor:

We are losing sight of the facts in all the Corridor K hysteria.

Option 8A - the one currently in favor - saves only two minutes over the existing road. The exact same two minutes would be saved by making spot improvements in the existing

road, and the most important one - widening the "trucker's curve" is already being done. These are TDOT's own numbers from February 17.

So ... people's visions of "flying over the mountain" are simply fantasies. The new road is not going to bring East Polk one bit closer to Cleveland or to the Volkswagen plant.

Everyone says that another rockslide is inevitable, so we need an alternate route. But what's going to happen to Hwy 64 if the new road is built? Maintaining it will be very expensive, even if there aren't any more rockslides. There has been talk of Polk County maintaining it, but we know the county doesn't have the money. There has also been talk of the forest service and the rafters maintaining it, but the forest service can't afford to maintain trails with its current budget, much less roads. It is doubtful that the rafters would accept this responsibility, even if they had the money. Supposedly, the governor has promised that the state will continue to maintain it, but I have heard that politicians sometimes promise things that don't actually happen.

The likeliest outcome will be that it will be maintained in a minimal way until there is another rockslide. If there is a rockslide west of the rafting put-in, it will probably be removed, so the Chattanooga people can get to the rafters. If it happens east of the put-in,

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it will probably just sit there, and the old road will be closed for good. Love it or hate it, the road through the gorge is a scenic route, and it draws a lot of tourists to our area. What will happen to businesses in East Polk if it is only passable to the rafting put-in?

The new road will involve big new cuts through some of the highest mountains in the area, and it will also be at risk for rock slides. At that point, we'll be right back where we started, having spent some \$320 million plus the additional cost of dealing with the acid rock. We'll have also torn up hundreds of acres of perfectly good national forest, which is what the tourists come here to see. Apparently a lot of people want to tear it up just to spite "the environmentalists," but I'm not sure it is a really smart idea.

The study on which this whole thing is based was done in 1965. Remember Lyndon Johnson? How about Appalachia and "the war on poverty?" The Beatles had a big hit with "Yesterday." That seems appropriate. It might have made sense to think that building more roads would help "Appalachia" back in those "thrilling days of yesteryear." But this is 2010, and we can't maintain the roads we already have. And we insist on building new ones, even though we know that rising fuel costs will eventually drive long distance freight to rail. In this particular case, we seem to be insisting on it because we've been promised it for so long that we actually feel entitled to it, whether it makes sense or not.

It makes a lot more sense to fix the existing road and to fix it right. It could be done far cheaper and far sooner and would provide exactly the same benefit. And ... it might actually happen.

Clyde Holler
Morganton, Georgia