

Dear TDOT:

Please accept the following comments on behalf of The Wilderness Society. We are currently working in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee to protect public and private forest land and the proposal to build Corridor K in TN will directly impact many of these areas. While we support economic development in these areas, we do not believe that the creation of a new highway, or major expansion of the existing one will necessarily facilitate the type of development that strengthens communities, protects natural resources, and enhances quality of life.

We understand that the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) has stated that all options are on the table in the current process, and that this includes keeping US 64 on its current alignment and including designs for the highway other than 4-lanes. The latter makes more economic and environmental sense, and recommend that as the preferred alternative.

The DEIS completed in 2003 which evaluated a 4-lane highway through this section of Corridor K documented negative impacts to over 30 threatened, endangered, and rare species and estimated a cost of at least \$1.5 billion. The proposal was also strenuously opposed by a wide variety of groups. Governor Bredeson rightly shelved the project at the time, and there is no reason to suppose that constructing a 4-lane highway through this area now will be less controversial or less costly. The Ocoee gorge is surrounded by steep national forest lands, and any design that places a 4-lane through these lands will have profound environmental impacts. I also understand that there are additional alternatives that will move the proposed Corridor close to the Big Frog Wilderness area. The Cohutta/ Big Frog is a class I airshed, and the impacts from commercial traffic to this will without a doubt have an impact. While I understand that this designation is primarily for new point source discharges, the impacts of a highway on these areas will be profound, and will be measurable.

Though the development corridors as envisioned by the ARC were important economic drivers during their inception, it seems difficult to justify these types of development scenarios in a modern day context. I-40 and I-75 routes between Asheville and Chattanooga did not exist at the time; neither did most of the region's 4-lane highways. Given the projection for development in this region, without this new highway, it does not make environmental or economic sense to facilitate more sprawl and chain store development that make the quality of life that people are moving here for, and staying here for, degraded in any way.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.

Sincerely,

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The mission of the Wilderness Society is to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places