

Study of Interstate-3 Has Started

If you thought the specter of I-3 had gone away, think again!

The Federal Highway Administration has signed a contract for studying the “Steps and estimated funding necessary to designate and construct a route for the 3rd Infantry Division Highway,” currently referred to as I-3. The interstate is proposed to run from Savannah to Augusta, Georgia; then to Knoxville, Tennessee cutting through the mountains of North Georgia, western North Carolina, and eastern Tennessee. The I-3 study is both specifically authorized and funded for \$1.32 million by SAFETEA-LU, the transportation funding act passed in 2005.

The study will be conducted by Federal contractor ICF International (ICFI) and is projected to take one year to complete. ICFI will develop four or five alternate routes combining different alignments and design levels (freeway or expressway) for each segment of the project. At least one of the alignments must go through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. ICFI must then estimate the costs and necessary steps to construct each proposed alternative route. Finally, there is an option for additional “sub-studies” on various economic,

social, and environmental factors which will require significant public involvement well beyond the scope of the Congressionally-mandated study.

WaysSouth is participating in the Expert Working Group that will be monitoring and providing input on the study. Jim Grode, Executive Director of WaysSouth, stated, “The construction of this highway would have a negative economic, environmental, and cultural impact on the Southern Appalachian region. We intend to ensure that the study is objective and thorough and fully considers the public’s opinion.”

WaysSouth is the only non-governmental organization on the Expert Working Group.

Ways South will provide updates on our website, www.wayssouth.org, and will issue action alerts when important public participation events occur. Visit us to sign up and help us ensure that the study unequivocally confirms what we already know: This multi-billion dollar project should never be built.



UPDATE

In This Issue

WaysSouth Partner: Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club - Pg. 2
Stop I-3 Fundraiser scheduled at Tiger Mountain Vineyards - Pg. 3
WaysSouth Contributors: Summer 2010 - Pg. 3
WaySouth Makes News - Pg. 4
US Highway 441 Widening Update - Pg. 5
Bird's Eye View of Corridor K Folley - Pgs. 6 & 7

PR

WaysSouth has established strong alliances with an impressive list of national, regional and local organizations that share a commitment to responsible transportation, development and natural resource protection. This is the third in a regular newsletter series that highlights these organizations. To see a full list of our Supporting Organizations go to our [WaysSouth website](#).

FILE



The Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club A WaysSouth Partner

Whatever the route that could be recommended for Interstate 3, Knoxville, TN would be the endpoint. Preventing this future scenario drives the Tennessee Chapter Sierra Club's (the Chapter) partnership with WaysSouth.

The Chapter has a dual purpose: to expose people to fun activities outdoors in settings that teach appreciation for nature; and to "keep Tennessee clean and green," explained Axel Ringe, Vice Conservation Chair of the Chapter and a WaysSouth board member. The club has plenty of experience in both arenas. Frequent club outings take groups hiking, canoeing, and backpacking throughout the southern Appalachians. The "clean and green" mission involves club members in working with local governments, state lawmakers and the courts to protect fragile environments. Recent efforts have focused on laws to control storm water runoff and monitor developers and industrial sites for compliance with existing environmental permits and regulations. [Note: Storm water discharges account for 60% of the pollution load to Tennessee waters—this is the largest water pollution source.]

The Chapter is divided into six local Sierra Club groups that operate autonomously on local issues to prevent negative environmental impacts. The state level organization gets involved when problems cut across group or state boundaries or when resources are needed to support important local efforts. The Chapter's involvement in Corridor K public participation is an example of just such an issue. Chattanooga's Cherokee Group members were active in attending public hearings and writing comments on proposals regarding Corridor K. Several from that group serve on the Tennessee Department of Transportation's Citizens Resource Team for the Corridor K project. The state Chapter supports these efforts. When the Tennessee Department of Transportation finally issues the draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) concerning Corridor K, the Chapter plans to be actively engaged in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process.

Similarly, as the I-3 Study begins in Washington DC, the Tennessee Chapter is prepared to bring the strength and experience of their organization to help WaysSouth prevent Interstate I-3 from ever becoming a reality.

Fund Raising Party To Help Stop I-3



You are invited to a "Learn About I-3" party at Ezzard Farms, Tiger, GA, on October 30, 2010, from 3 PM until 7 PM. The party will be held under the Oak Trees behind the Tiger Mountain Vineyards on Old 441, South just north of Tiger, GA.

We plan a dinner of Barbequed Chicken with all the "fixins," several bands, activities for the children, readings from 4 books written by local authors and lots of information about the I-3 study currently being conducted. The Tiger Mountain Vineyard will waive the tasting fee at the winery for those over 21. In case of rain, the party will be held indoors in Tiger.

Tickets for the party are \$15.00 in advance, (\$20.00 at the time of the party) with children 10 and under admitted free. Tickets are available from Stacye Morgan (stacyemorgan@windstream.net), Lucy Bartlett (lucyebartlett@gmail.com) or payment can be sent to: WaysSouth, 1074 Arbor Drive, Lakemont, GA 30552 (designate "Party" on the "for" line). Tickets will be at the "will call" table at the party. Please indicate how many children will attend for free when you buy your tickets, for accurate food preparation.

Volunteers are needed for this event. Contact Lucy Bartlett at lucyebartlett@gmail.com to help out.

WaysSouth Contributors - Summer 2010

With the threat of Interstate 3 very real, many are looking to WaysSouth to provide the leadership and action to monitor and help prevent this highway from sprouting wheels. We sincerely thank the following generous supporters who have recently contributed financially to keep WaysSouth in business:

Allison Adams
Kent Adams
Norma Balthazar
Lucy Bartlett
James Bishop
Chloe Coger
Keely Croft
Holly Demuth
William Denton
Linda Di Santis and Bob Kerr
Ted Doll
Marie Dunkle
R.A. and P.A. Ebbs III
Kurt Emmanuele
Elizabeth Etheridge
George Evans
Robert and Nancy Fichter

Richard R. Fisher
K.A and L.M. Ford
Edna Foster
Howard Frumkin
Kimbal Fulbright
Joe Gatins
Bob and Judy Grove
Kim Gruelle
Susan Harmon
Evan Heckel
Tom Hoffman
Kyle Holder
Clyde Holler
William L. Hood, IV
Veronica Humphrey
Andrew Hunt
Robin Jones

Jeanine Jones
Charley Kraus
Sally Lassiter
Oly Lombard
The Lyndhurst Foundation
Daniel Martin
Peter and Annette Mayfield
Peggy McBride
D.C. and C. McDonald
Don McGowan
Eston and Peggy Melton
John Michalski
David Milikin
Phyllis H. Miller
V. Miller
Jane Nelson (The Rootcellar)
Robert Oftedal

Dr. John V. O'Sullivan
Tim and Amber Price-Williams
Lilith Quinlan
David B. Reister
Frank and Candace Retter
Judy Robinson
Leckie Stack
Clyde Taylor
Towns County Homeowners' Association
Grace Trimble
William D. Vines III
Edus and Harriet Warren
Terry Wehunt
Clair Wiederholt
Stancil O. Wise

WaysSouth In The News

The initial reactions to the I-3 Study from regional, national and even international news media are at an all-time high. Here are links to a variety of recent news stories, most of which report the folly of this interstate project.



<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/aug/22/possible-tenn-ga-interstate-eyed/>
(Chattanooga Times Free Press)

<http://www2.journalnow.com/content/2010/aug/23/study-done-for-new-interstate/>
(Winston-Salem NC)

<http://wsbradio.com/localnews/2010/08/new-highway-coming-to-georgia.html>
(WSB - Atlanta GA)

<http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9025715>
(Kingsport Tennessee)

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100822/NEWS01/100822014/Feds-eye-new-Georgia-Tennessee-interstate>
(Nashville TN)

<http://www.11alive.com/news/local/story.aspx?storyid=151107&catid=3>
(Atlanta GA)

http://www.onlineathens.com/stories/082410/new_699382074.shtml
(Athens GA)

<http://chronicle.augusta.com/latest-news/2010-08-23/talks-resume-new-interstate-linking-augusta-knoxville>
(Augusta GA)

<http://gosmokies.knoxnews.com/profiles/blogs/i3-corridor-is-back-on-the>
(Knoxville TN)

<http://www.citizen-times.com/article/20100830/OPINION01/308300010/Why-should-we-plan-for-a-road-no-one-wants->
(Asheville NC)

<http://logisticsweek.com/road/2010/08/us-considers-new-tennessee-georgia-interstate/>
(Singapore)

<http://www2.wsav.com/news/2010/aug/22/new-interstate-could-connect-savannah-and-knoxvill-ar-736991/>
(Savannah GA)

If you see media or blog coverage involving WaysSouth, I-3, CorridorK, or the project to widen U.S. 441, please drop us a line at the WaysSouth website www.waysouth.org or info@waysouth.org to help us monitor the news media on these important issues.



Widening of US 441: An Update

Rabun Gap Nacoochee School could be impacted by widening of US 441

"The project is moving forward to be built," stated Steve Walker of the Georgia Department of Transportation, referring to plans to widen U.S. 441 from Clayton, GA to the North Carolina line. Members of WaysSouth's U. S. 441 Task Force were in touch with the GDOT and received the following update.

GDOT project manager, Ms. Hiral Patel stated that although the project planning and engineering was finished in 2002, GDOT must mitigate some trout stream problems and has not yet submitted an environmental study to assess materials needed.

Two kinds of environmental studies can be done: an Environmental Assessment (EA) or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). An EA is the equivalent of an "EIS-late" and can only be done where there will be "no significant impact on the human environment." The EA process is somewhat less rigorous than the EIS process and concludes with the issuance of a "Finding of No Significant Impact" or FONSI. If there will be a signif-

icant impact, the agency must prepare an EIS. GDOT intends to prepare an EA for this project.

GDOT's target date to submit the draft EA is October 2010. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will review the draft, and after they give their approval, the GDOT will hold a public hearing on the draft document. Any comments they receive will be addressed and a final EA issued sometime after the hearing.

Ms Patel reported that plans include an 8 foot raised median through Dillard but everywhere else plans include a 20 foot median with turn lanes at selected places. The GDOT feels that the median is essential for safety reasons. The 20 foot median will have a major impact on several communities, the scenic Rabun Gap Valley and major farms through the area. WaysSouth representatives who have reviewed the current GDOT plans noted that the drawings do not represent many current businesses and conditions along the U.S. 441 route north of Clayton.

Ms Patel indicated that updated plans are not completed.

The GDOT state budget for Right of Way acquisitions is \$2 million for 2011 fiscal year and \$25 million for 2017 fiscal year (July 2015-June 2016). Original estimates of the U.S. 441 Right of Way acquisition totaled \$81,042,260. The construction is in the long range category which means "more than 6 years." Ms Patel said there would be a public input meeting in Spring 2011.

GDOT contacts for the U.S. 441 widening project include: Mr. Steve Walker (404-631-1789) the person with area highway improvement responsibility and Ms Hiral Patel (706-601-1849) the project manager. The project number is #IP 122090.

The Ways South U.S. 441 Task Force will meet again soon to develop a draft of the Ways South position on this highway project which will be presented to the Board of Directors for their comments and approval.

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF HIGHWAY FOLLY: CORRIDOR K

On June 9, 2010, WaysSouth board member and professional photographer Don McGowan (earthsongphotography.com) and Executive Director Jim Grode flew with SouthWings (www.southwings.org) to view Corridor K, the highway route from Asheville to Chattanooga, conceived in 1965 to help stimulate economic development in the region. Most of the route is currently a four lane highway but two sections—one in North Carolina and one in Tennessee—remain two lanes. Even though the rationale for Corridor K has been made moot by the development of the Interstate system, changing demographics in the region, and the economic realities of industry in the twenty-first century, there remains great pressure to “upgrade” the remaining sections. We hoped to develop a new understanding of the challenges and treasures of the route by seeing it from above.

As we boarded SouthWings pilot Tom Komer's Cessna 206, the partly cloudy skies, 70-degree temperatures, and windless air portended a smooth flight, but haze and humidity made for less than ideal conditions for photography. Leaving the Asheville airport, we flew west over the Great Balsam Range—the highest point on the Blue Ridge Parkway—and after about half an hour of flying,

we reached our starting point.

The segment of Corridor K that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to “upgrade” to a new four-lane

it. Pausing for a moment to circle the Stecoah Valley Arts Center, we reflected on the cultural treasure that would be lost if this valley were to become just another route for travelers to get further down the road. This vantage point also gave us a view to the head of the Stecoah Valley where the valley narrows and steepens. A 160-foot high road cut and half-mile tunnel will be necessary for a four lane highway through this area.

Continuing west, we flew over Stecoah Gap, where the Appalachian Trail crosses the existing road. NC DOT's proposed highway would tunnel under, rather than crossing over, the mountain and the Appalachian Trail (AT) here. However, the steep terrain and seemingly endless waves of forested mountains visible through the plane's windows were a stark reminder of the visual intrusion a major highway would cause for trail hikers seeking solitude.

As we flew down the Sweetwater Creek valley toward Robbinsville the land became more developed and less forbidding. But the many small buildings nestled up against the road warned of the human and economic cost of the homes and businesses that would be destroyed by a major widening of the road.

highway begins near Lake Fontana and the Tsali Recreation Area, where North Carolina Highway 28 narrows from four lanes to two. Here we could easily see from the air how a new Corridor K would cut a swath through the rich agricultural valley of Stecoah Creek, taking out farms and historic buildings with



Aerial View of Stecoah Community

We reached the junction with U.S. Highway 129 just south of Robbinsville, the end of the segment that NC DOT is currently studying. Seeing the twists and turns of Highway 129 as it headed southeast toward Topton and the Nantahala Gorge brought home the folly of building a four-lane highway that will dump travelers onto a two-lane country road that is already considered the most dangerous in Graham County.

Finally, we turned south to fly over the segment of Corridor K that would pass through the largely roadless Snowbird Mountains from Robbinsville to Andrews. This section is so daunting that NC DOT has postponed consideration of the section, instead concentrating on building the segment east of

Robbinsville. Crossing these mountains was the “Wow!” moment of the trip when we could see first-hand the absurdity—not to say impossibility—of building a four-lane highway through such rugged country. Even taking into account the planned 6000-foot tunnel (reportedly the longest in the east) that would help smooth out the grade, it was difficult to envision where a highway could physically be placed in those mountains, much less see it as a financially feasible project.

As we debated which of the narrow drainages coming down the south side of the Snowbird range might be deemed suitable for a highway, it hit home that the goal of “completing” Corridor K as a continuous four-lane highway from Asheville to Chattanooga is no more than a pipe dream. Even ignoring the devastation such a road would wreak on the environmental, cultural, visual,

and historic values of the region, the financial costs of building a highway in this region are simply prohibitive.

From Andrews, we had hoped to head to the Tennessee section of Corridor K, where the state DOT wants to build a similar highway that would bypass the Ocoee Gorge and cut through the rugged and relatively pristine Cherokee National Forest. Unfortunately, the weather stopped cooperating. With thunderstorms already in Knoxville, heading west was pointless. As we turned around and flew over the Nantahala Mountains back to Asheville, clouds were already so thick we couldn't see the ground.

Sincere thanks go out to the SouthWings staff and pilot, Tom Komer, who made this trip possible at no cost to WaysSouth and were gracious at every step of the process. Never has the folly of sacrificing the Stecoah area and surrounding national forests, in the name of an outdated notion of a highway corridor that can't be built, been more obvious than while seeing the area from above.

*Written by:
Jim Grode, Executive Director,
WaysSouth*

Aerial View of Snowbird Range



WaysSouth
1074 Arbor Dr.
Lakemont GA 30552
706 508-3711
info@WaysSouth.org
www.WaysSouth.org

