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Bethany project debated

Scaled-back widening appears closer to reality

By Jessica Brown
The Cincinnati Enquirer

LEBANON – A scaled-back Bethany Road widening project appeared closer to reality after more than 100 people voiced concerns at a public hearing Monday.

"I personally killed the idea of a six-lane connector. There are 500 people who signed a petition tonight," said Warren County Commissioner Dave Young, who chairs the task force studying the road project.

"I just hung up with the county engineer and I asked, 'Can we get away with three lanes instead of four?'"

"That's what I'm going to ask we move forward with," he said after the meeting. "I might kill it down to three."

The \$35 million Bethany widening is one of about 20 projects totaling \$350 million considered in the Southwest Warren County Transportation Study. The study was formed to address the region's growth and transportation needs in the next 25 years.

The second and final public meeting will be held at 5 p.m. today at the Warren

County Administration Building on Justice Drive in Lebanon.

The study's task force will meet Aug. 19 to review the written comments gathered from residents. It will make a recommendation later this year.

Project leaders have said Bethany Road needs to be widened from two lanes to four for safety reasons and to accommodate expected growth.

The road carries 9,400 vehicles a day, up from 5,000 a day in 2002, officials said.

By 2020, that number is expected to reach 20,000, according to the County Engineer's Office.

Opponents have said planners want to turn their road into an east-west connector route between Interstates 71 and 75 via Mason-Morrow-Milgrove Road. They want three lanes, maximum.

If it's any wider, they say it will draw unwanted regional traffic onto their residential streets.

Some at the hearing accused officials of catering to developers.

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They charged that officials favor people outside the region and ignore the local residents.

The question of the day was: "Why Bethany?"

When Chris Inzerello decided to build his house in a subdivision off of Bethany Road, he figured the street would eventually be improved. But he thinks four lanes would draw too much regional traffic.

The Chicago native and father of five was one of several residents who said if officials want a connector, there are other options.

Anger flared from time to time as some opponents said they felt betrayed by their leaders.

"You guys are lying to us," said Jeff Smith, raising his voice at Mason Councilman John McCurley, a member of the task force.

"You guys are going to do what you want to do," said Smith, who lives in the Arbor Creek subdivision.

When McCurley protested, Smith interrupted and began berating the councilman until he walked away in frustration.

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