

Rip up the airport's runway to repair it?

A group of pilots who have been vocal about safety concerns at the McMinn County Airport said Monday they support excavating a piece of the runway to permanently eliminate a line-of-sight issue.

RYAN HARRIS
Staff Writer

McMinn County Mayor John Gentry has said project officials are exploring three options to permanently fix the line-of-sight issues at the airport. Two of those options will involve more construction,

while the other plan would alter operations at the airport.

Kenny Witt, the flight instructor who said his ties with the airport were severed because of his "whistleblowing," told the County Commission this week that removing a piece of the runway was the only suitable option. Witt spoke on behalf

of a new organization called S.A.F.E., or Safe Airport and Flight Enthusiasts.

"We encourage the County Commission to seek the most beneficial permanent repair by excavating that part of the runway inhibiting the line of sight," Witt said as he read from a prepared

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'We believe that the most economical permanent repair to the line of sight is to actually remove the obstacle, the hump. Removal through excavation, while costly in the short term, will be the most economical permanent solution in the long term.'

Kenny Witt

Runway

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statement. "We believe that the most economical permanent repair to the line of sight is to actually remove the obstacle, the hump. Removal through excavation, while costly in the short term, will be the most economical permanent solution in the long term."

Witt said the excavation option will allow the airport to still receive an upgraded classification, to a Class C airport. That, he said, was one of the main goals when a major \$5 million overhaul of the airport first began. Witt also said the excavation option would provide "greater compliance with FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) developmental standards for future growth surrounding the new taxiway."

Witt also encouraged coun-

ty officials to push for the state to fund the runway fix.

Gentry has said McMinn County will not be held financially responsible.

"The state holds the purse strings on this," the mayor said.

Gentry also said progress is being made to fix the runway, and he is monitoring the state's activity on the project.

"We're watching that very closely," the mayor said.

A section of the runway and taxiway have been closed as a temporary solution to the line-of-sight problem. Witt agreed the issues have been "temporarily mitigated."

Other pilots have spoken out against Witt and other airport critics, saying "the recent unsolicited red-flag waving" is "unjust and overstated."

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Sewer Grant

The board unanimously approved a resolution to apply for a Community Development Block Grant to improve the city's sewer system.

The grant applies for \$195,316 in federal money requiring a local match of \$16,984, for a total of \$212,300 to be used to rehabilitate the city's sewer lines.

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THE PUBLIC MIND**Which route
should I-69 take?****To the Editor:**

To the citizens of Dyersburg and Dyer County, what is your view on I-69? TDOT has said there is a federal mandate to build I-69, so it is not a matter of will it be built, but which way will it run? Should it go East or West of Hwy 51?

The Dyer County Chamber of Commerce has expressed their opinion that the Highway should circle Dyersburg and run west of highway 51. Is this the best route to take? Will it bring more crime, pollution and congestion as some suggested at the November meeting? What is the additional cost? Will the economic gains offset the additional cost and problems that this route would bring? I personally do not think that it will, but each individual should answer that question for themselves and make their views known to their state and local officials.

It is my opinion that I-69 should run east of Hwy 51. Below are 7 reasons why this would be the most economical and logical route. I don't want to see anyone lose their home, so before those on the east side turn me off, please read the entire article and see my comments about what TDOT could do with some of the \$67,000,000.00 savings if the interstate goes east.

1. It would disrupt fewer homes. On the east side there will be 59 vs. 111 on the west side. This alone should be reason enough to run it east. Why disrupt any more homes than necessary?

2. It would cost \$67,400,000.00 less to run east than west. Again this alone should be reason enough to run it east. Why spend any more of the taxpayers dollars than necessary?

3. The railroad is on the east side, which would go hand in hand with the truck service from I-69.

4. If it ran east it would accommodate more counties, such as Crockett, Haywood, etc.

5. If it ran east it would put the road further from the fault line in case of an earthquake.

6. There are 5 hazardous material sights on the west side and none on the east side.

7. There is already an interstate west of Dyersburg. That is I-55 on the other side of the river. Again why waste taxpayer dollars to run two interstates that close together.

Now to those on the east side, especially to the 59 homes that may be disrupted. I believe TDOT could take a small portion of the \$67,000,000.00, but all of it if necessary, and route I-69 to where it would not disrupt any homes. It is my belief that people should come first and money second, but in this case you could put people first and still save money.

I realize there are some trying to force I-69 to the west, but it would simply not be fair to disrupt anymore homes than necessary and to cost the taxpayer an extra \$67,000,000.00 just to appease a few.

Whatever your opinion may be, I would encourage you to write, call, visit or email your state and local officials and make your views known. Even though there will not be a vote, TDOT officials did say that state and local politicians would have considerable influence on the route I-69 will take. You should also contact the Governor and TDOT to let them know where you stand on this important issue. It may also be necessary to start a petition drive to prove the strength of your views. There is one underway in Lauderdale County.

MARVIN WILSON

Rtpley



LINDSAY McDONALD/The Jackson Sun

This overpass, which takes Tenn. 76 over Interstate 40 at Exit 56 near Brownsville, will be imploded next month.

Overpass to be imploded

By PETE WICKHAM

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Super Bowl weekend in Brownsville could come in with a boom.

Sometime in the early-morning hours of the first weekend in February, Tennessee Department of Transportation officials plan to implode the old two-lane overpass that takes Tenn. 76 over Interstate 40 at Exit 56.

For the 12 to 18 hours it takes to clear the debris after it drops to the highway, interstate traffic will be rerouted to the exit ramps around the rubble. Tenn. 76 will be closed during that time period.

After that, traffic on Tenn. 76 will continue over a two-lane bridge that was completed as part of Phase 1 of a \$12 million project. An additional bridge, with three more lanes, will be constructed where the old bridge stood. That work should take three to six months.



Patel



Kinnon

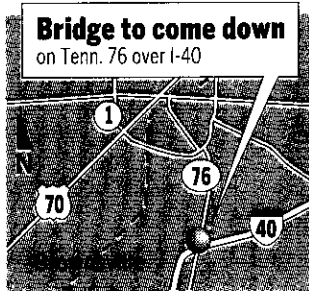
has occupied one of the main commerce centers in Brownsville and Haywood County.

"It's already affected us in terms of lost funds," said Mel Patel, who is the general manager of the Comfort Inn and Days Inn motels at the interchange.

"I'm waiting for highway

"We're still deciding when the best time would be (to implode the overpass), in terms of impacting the least amount of people," said Ross Sherwood, an operations specialist supervisor with TDOT's Region 4 office.

It will mark the beginning of the final phase of a project that



lights to go up at the exit again. Not having those to light up the interchange, people automatically pass you by."

Some additional closures will be needed while the bridge is completed.

"There will be additional closures of about three to four hours as we install the five support beams needed for the bridge, but we will announce that schedule as we get closer to the actual date," Sherwood said.

TDOT spokesperson Pamela Marshall, community affairs officer for TDOT Region 4, said, "We wanted to get a general

schedule out to the public so they can plan around what it is we have to do to that section of the interstate. While things could change a little, we thought it better than not saying anything until just before we hit the switch."

Dorothy Kinnon, who manages the Exxon station on the south side of the interchange said, "TDOT has kept us fairly well in the loop throughout this. I know it will be better when it's over."

She hopes there will be a little more traffic control signage in the final configuration. "People come off the interstate east-bound and turn south onto 76 without stopping. There's going to be a serious wreck there if they don't do something."

More than that, she is ready for one thing. "I'm tired of eating dust coming to or leaving work," she said with a smile.

Visit jacksonsun.com and share your thoughts.

— Pete Wickham, 425-9668

Lane change



Nikki Boertman/The Commercial Appeal

The Midtown interstate project will add a lane in each direction, double the capacity of the ramps and separate I-40 traffic from vehicles on I-240.

Flyover ramp for Midtown road project expected to open in March

By **TOM CHARLIER**
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A DELAY IN THE COMPLETION of a flyover ramp means motorists at the Interstate 40-240 Midtown interchange will have to stay grounded a while longer.

Previously slated to open two months ago, the ramp now is expected to be carrying traffic by the first week of March, said Tennessee Department of Transportation spokesman Pamela Marshall.

The reason for the delay is a change in the type of noise walls to be installed along the ramp and at the remainder of the interchange.

Instead of walls that reflect noise, officials opted for more-protective barriers that absorb noise, Marshall said.

"Any time you have changes in a contract, changes in a project, unfortunately it causes some delays," she said.

The 1,400-foot ramp is expected to substantially reduce congestion when it opens. It will replace a full-circle, 25-mph ramp carrying northbound vehicles to I-40-240 to westbound I-40.

The ramp is part of a \$53 million project to rebuild the Midtown interchange.

The 1½-mile-long project will add one lane in each direction, double the

capacity of the interstate ramps and separate I-40 traffic from vehicles on I-240.

The work also includes the removal of 19 bridges, seven of which will be replaced.

The original interchange, with its cloverleaf ramps, was inadequate to serve as a main link on I-40, officials say.

The project, slated for completion in December of this year, had been at least three months ahead of schedule before the noise-wall changes.

"We're still ahead, but not as much as we used to be," Marshall said.

— Tom Charlier:
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