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Local News - Friday, June 30, 2006

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Downtown and 'outer loop' top traffic concerns

By NIKKI YOUNG

The Times

Residents asked transportation planners Thursday to focus traffic improvements on Jesse Jewell and E.E. Butler parkways and Hall County's northern end.

The Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Planning Organization, or MPO, invited the public to select focus areas for its long-range transportation plan through 2035. Thursday night's session drew about 30 people to the Georgia Mountains Center.

An action plan through 2030 was adopted in December 2004 by the organization's policy committee, made up of local elected officials. Growth and changes in the county's intentions for future development necessitate the update.

Signal upgrades for Jesse Jewell Parkway, from Pearl Nix to Downey Boulevard, are on the radar for 2005-10. They are sorely needed, said Gainesville resident Charity Wang, because out-of-kilter signal timing backs up traffic.

"If you're stopped by one light in the sequence, get ready, because you're going to hit every single light," Wang said.

An "outer loop" is a concept that also received much attention Thursday.

The arc would link Ga. 365 and Dawsonville Highway (Ga. 53), connecting northeastern and western Hall while bypassing downtown Gainesville traffic.

To get through Gainesville, North Hall resident Evelyn Reynolds frequently fights traffic on Limestone Parkway, U.S. 129 and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. She said an outer loop to divert some of the in-town traffic is a concept she's seen in other large, well-planned cities.

"I go to many other towns, and it's so easy to get around," Reynolds said.

Transportation plan

For more information or to comment on the Gainesville-Hall County Metropolitan Planning Organization's long-range transportation plan, contact: (770) 531-6809; e-mail planner John McHenry at jmchenry@hallcounty.org; or go online at www.ghmpo.org.



The Sardis Road Connector, planned for construction between 2011-20, could be considered the beginning of the loop. The four-lane road will link Dawsonville Highway and Thompson Bridge Road, curtailing dangerous cut-through traffic on residential streets.

Hall County Engineer Kevin McInturff said an engineering firm has been contracted to design the road. Preliminary surveys are finished and engineering work will begin soon, he said.

Engineering and acquiring right of way will take at least two years. The total cost is estimated at \$12.6 million, with \$4.5 million provided by 1-cent sales tax revenue.

"It's going to be a lengthy project, because it's going to be a new alignment, and you have to look at a lot of factors," such as engineering, historical and environmental considerations, McInturff said.

The MPO will evaluate the public's input, discuss it with members, gather more data and decide on focus areas through 2035. The next public meeting will be in November.

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