

March 9, 2022

What follows are newspaper articles from the years 1998 through 2000 covering the massive push by Oklahoma state agencies to construct what came to be called "The Outer Loop," a gigantic proposed highway construction project. I hope this collection can help shed light and provide some background context and perspective regarding the current efforts to build a turnpike in East Norman.

There were multiple proposals coming from many different angles; it could be an Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) project using federal funds, or a toll-road built by the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA). It could also be a NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) truck bypass, funneling 30,000 trucks a day through eastern McClain, Cleveland and Oklahoma counties around the Oklahoma City metro area, with it and the nearby Interstate 35 areas being designated official "NAFTA Trade Corridors," garnering federal funds and jurisdiction.

All plans called for a multilane highway beginning somewhere in the I-35/Purcell/Wayne/Payne area, heading east through Norman, Moore, Oklahoma City, Choctaw, Jones, Harrah/Newalla, and joining back up with I-35 somewhere in the Edmond and Arcadia areas.

Involved government groups and individuals were: ODOT, OTA, the City Councils of Norman, Moore, Choctaw, Jones, Arcadia and Edmond, Governor Frank Keating, ODOT/OTA head Neal McCaleb, lead ODOT engineer David Streb (now President of Poe and Associates), The Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG), The I-35 Trade corridor Study Group, the North American Supercorridor Coalition (NASCO), the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) and representatives of the Kickapoo, Absentee Shawnee and Citizen Potawatomi tribes. Ad hoc citizens groups also formed in Norman, Choctaw, Jones, Arcadia and Edmond. Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) were also involved, such as Common Cause, the North American Transportation Institute, and The Sierra Club.

There was also the involvement of a quasi-governmental group called the Continental Gateway Authority (CGA), based in Purcell, run by Purcell politicians and bankers, which was pressuring Oklahoma lawmakers for legislation granting them the same road building, bond selling and eminent domain powers as the OTA.

The newspaper articles come from numerous newspapers in the metro area, including some from the since-discontinued "Norman Oklahoman," which was a supplement of the Daily/Sunday Oklahoman newspaper.

Due to public opposition and outcry, plans for the Outer Loop were dropped, with the City Councils/Boards of Trustees of Norman (1-12-99), Arcadia (2-20-99), Jones (3-2-99) and Choctaw (3-16-99) supporting "no build" options, with Jones going so far as to oppose "any outer loop, I-35 Trade Corridor bypass or turnpike within town limits."

In a press release issued by Zach Taylor of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, ODOT/OTA head Neal McCaleb stated, "The people of central Oklahoma have spoken and we have listened." McCaleb declared the Outer Loop "dead."

As an East Norman land owner at the time, and having volunteered early on, I was deeply involved in the Outer Loop opposition movement. I became one of the main organizers, and spoke to thousands of people, sharing their concerns and trying to explain things as best I could. As Edmond organizer Jerry Sochor told me, regarding how he became involved, "I was waiting for Moses to come along, take my hand and lead me to the promised land, when I realized I was the one out front waving the flag!"

I quickly learned that, what I thought was a simple Norman problem, was really a problem touching all of the OKC metro area. There were thousands of people who were mad as hell, and weren't gonna take it any more. I got to meet some amazing people.

Three groups left an everlasting impression on me. One group I came to call the "Granny Shotgun Brigade." I received countless phone calls from elderly women who all told me essentially the same story. "Dave," they would say, "my Granddaddy built this house, on this land, and we've been here ever since. My Daddy was born here in this house, and I was born here, and by God, if any state highway crooks try to take it away, I'll get my shotgun and shoot the sonsabitches!" The Granny Shotgun Brigade.

The second group were members of the local Native Tribes. Some of them, particularly the young males, had vowed to take up arms against anyone desecrating their sacred burial grounds, as some of the grounds were shown on public ODOT Outer Loop maps. This stance moved me greatly, as they were much more committed to protecting their ancestors grave sites than any white people I knew.

The third group was led by the Mayor of Arcadia, Marilyn Murrell. Mayor Murrell was an old-school civil rights activist trained in the ways of Martin Luther King Jr.-style non-violent civil disobedience. She was super-cool, yet not a woman to be taken lightly. I will never forget when she vowed before me and other local organizers that she would chain herself to any bulldozer trying to build a highway in her town.

After hearing their declarations of commitment, I would always say, "Wow. I hope to God it never comes to that." And, thankfully, it never did. Yet, here we are today, repeating history.

Dave Moore

Proposed outer loop location brings concern

Norman Transcript, 6-14-98, front page

► State highway planners want to hear public comments

By S.E. Ruckman
Transcript Staff Writer

Imagine a Norman where virtually no semi-truck and their double trailers are blazing along I-35. If it seems too much to believe, think again.

In a series of public meetings the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Governments will discuss a proposed outer highway loop to carry traffic around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. The first meeting is set

for Tuesday at 7 p.m. in the Lowry Room at the Norman Public Library, 225 N. Webster.

If you go

The public hearing will be held at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Lowry Room at the Norman Public Library, 225 N. Webster.

The loop, which officials maintain is still in the concept stages, would be an alternative route to I-35. I-35 is to become the North American Free Trade Agreement corridor, the need for a loop will rise accordingly, according to Zac Taylor, executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

Local officials have raised questions about the placement of the proposed loop. State officials have proposed the loop be located on State Highway 9 between Blanchard and Newcastle at U.S. Hwy. 62. The state Department of Transportation

carry loop traffic to the east side of Norman.

One plan suggests an eastern turnpike leg that would cut north from Highway 9 somewhere near 48th Avenue SE to 60th Avenue SE.

City officials view the situation with some concern, according to city planner Pat Copeland. Routing more traffic onto State Highway 9 through south Norman would create a situation similar to the

would then four lane State Highway 9 from the U.S. Hwy 62 junction east to Interstate 35, according to officials.

Another view on the loop is to also use existing Highway 9 across the south side of Norman to

Broadway Extension in north Oklahoma City, Copeland said.

So far, citizens are concerned with splitting east Norman with a possible turnpike west of Lake Thunderbird.

Some have suggested that if one is needed it be built east of the lake in order to preserve the rural quality of the east side and the lake's drainage basin.

Copeland said the plan could have major traffic and environmental impact on Norman.

"This public meeting affords Norman citizens the opportunity to become informed about the project and to voice their opinions about the proposed outer loop corridor," he said.

Reporter S.E. Ruckman covers city government. She can be reached at 366-3540.

Officials see need for new highways to avoid congestion

By S.E. Ruckman
Transcript Staff Writer

The need for a traffic loop encircling Oklahoma City can be summed up in two words, according to the executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

"Without being melodramatic, time and safety are our most paramount reasons," said Zac Taylor.

Even in the face of the present widening of I-35, improvements to help traffic flow in and around Oklahoma City are long overdue, Taylor said.

"Our prediction is that I-35 will become a congested corridor and may not satisfy the needs of those who use it," he said.

Taylor said citizens that become involved in the loop planning are making an investment into what Norman will look like in the next century.

"We want to make sure any proposals are compatible with their visions of future land use," he said.

Mark Long, of Cobb Engineering, said the loop study was the largest study of its kind in Oklahoma.

"By the time we get through with this process, it will impact half a million people," he said.

Taylor said getting everyone involved in the loop perimeter process and learning how to preserve the corridor will go beyond local and state applications in the future.

"I think there is a very compelling reason to be involved in this," he said. "Instinctively we know there will be more commercial traffic. There are new alternatives people may want to consider."

Long said keeping the goal of the study in mind was tantamount, although there is no funding for this project so far and no plans for future construction.

"If we don't do this now, in five years, we might not be able to get the right-of-way for it," he said.

Reporter S.E. Ruckman covers city government. She can be reached at 366-3540.

Norman Transcript 6-25-98 ←

City not in favor of current loop plan

By S.E. Ruckman
Transcript Staff Writer

A packed house greeted the steering committee for the Outer Loop proposal at the Lowry Room June 16.

Richard Massie, director of planning, made it clear the city's view was not in favor of the loop as proposed.

Massie made a brief four-point presentation to the 100 or so people on Norman's input given the policies on land use by Norman's 2020 plan.

"That alignment and location will be the biggest benefit to citizens of Norman — not in favor of a map that goes to south of Norman," he said, referring to the proposed loop area.

He said that State Highway 9 is not a suitable portion for the Outer Loop because of the road capacity for which it was intended.

"That road is designed to carry 26,000 people and not designed for an Outer Loop capacity," he said.

He emphasized it would be cost prohibitive, destroying budding land use.

He said it not only compromised the land use plan as outlined in Norman 2020, plus he also cited the

watershed of Lake Thunderbird.

"It is totally appropriate to suggest the need to consider taking off for a bypass east of Lake Thunderbird by Pauls Valley or Purcell to the south of us," he said.

He said the steering committee's proposal about the loop's placement was not a done deal.

"We are a member of Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG). We do have input into this process," he said. "We wanted the people of Norman to know where we stand."

The current proposal, outlined by the committee, has the loop utilizing State Highway 9 cutting north around 48th Avenue Southeast and 60th Avenue Southeast.

Members of a committee comprised of ACOG, Oklahoma Depart-

ment of Transportation (ODOT) members, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and Cobb Engineering addressed the audience with a synopsis of their proposal in addition to a question and answer period.

Terry McFall, of ODOT, reminded the crowd that even if a proposed

loop were to be agreed upon that evening, no funds have been set aside to fund the loop that would enclose Oklahoma City and its adjoining cities.

The steering committee also outlined the importance of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the designation

of Interstate 35 as a major trade corridor as key reasons for the need of a loop.

McFall said the Outer Loop study would meld into a present I-35 trade

corridor study.

Marc Long, of Cobb Engineering, said the committee was trying to find out what needs to be done and then how to do it so that it could be incorporated into the I-35 study.

Long suggested tolls, bonds, highway funds and private moneys for building the loop, if it were built.

He said the Outer Loop study should be completed in January of 1999 or in the spring of next year at the latest. He said the steering committee would schedule public meetings for the fall for further input on their final evaluation.

He said evaluation of public input was invaluable to the study.

"It is my observation the people of Norman are very concerned with the outcome of this study," he said.

Zac Taylor, of ACOG, said preservation of desired land use was the key concept on every level of the study.

"We are not just studying where the lines go, but how to preserve those lines if it is our intent to have a loop in the future," he said.

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"It is my observation the people of Norman are very concerned with the outcome of this study."

— Marc Long, of
Cobb Engineering

Area Residents Urge Rail System Over Highway Loop

By Christy Watson
Staff Writer

Oklahoma City area residents asked state transportation officials Monday night to consider light rail and other forms of mass transit as an option to building a highway to ease congestion on metro area roads.

About 85 people from Oklahoma City, Edmond, Norman, Choctaw, Jones and Midwest City attended the first of two public meetings to discuss four possible routes for an outer loop highway surrounding the metro

area.

The meetings are part of a \$375,000 study by the Oklahoma Transportation Department, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments to identify the highway's location and preserve land for the road.

Edmond resident Don Whitney said new roads often redistribute traffic but don't ease congestion. He also said a commuter light rail system would protect the area's air quality.

Marc Long, vice president of

Cobb Engineering, said transportation modes like light rail will be considered when coupled with a new highway.

Long, whose company has studied several potential routes for an outer loop, presented four proposals approved by a steering committee of state and local officials.

Those routes, designated Corridors X, Y, Z and F, will be narrowed to one after the public meetings and a more detailed study of the routes' economic and environmental impacts.

The study doesn't mean a road surrounding the metro will be built soon.

"We're nowhere near being able to put right of way lines on a map," said David Streb of the state transportation department in response to questions about how many homeowners may have to give up their homes for highway building.

While many residents wanted to know when a road will be built and its exact location, Streb and Long said no money is available for the road and the

alignment will not be known until next spring.

Another public meeting will be at 7 tonight at the Moore-Norman Vo-Tech in Norman.

To share comments about where you think the loop should be located, contact the state transportation department, 521-6433; the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, 425-3600; or the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, 848-8961.

Information about the study also is available on the Internet at www.outerloop.com.

Possible Loop Routes

Following are the four potential corridors for an outer-loop highway surrounding the metro area. Each of the corridors, as designated by Cobb Engineering Co., is 2 miles wide. The exact route of the highway will be narrowed when one corridor is selected.

F Corridor: Would connect with the Kilpatrick Turnpike as it crosses Interstate 40 at Sara Road. The highway would extend south and cross the H.E. Bailey Turnpike and head east on Highway 9. The road would turn at 60th Avenue SE and follow Choctaw Road until it crosses the Turner Turnpike before ending at Interstate 35 north of Edmond.

Z Corridor: Would connect with the Kilpatrick Turnpike as it crosses I-40 at Sara Road. The highway would curve east and south crossing Interstate 44 near Meridian and Telephone Road near Tecumseh Road. The loop would continue east and north, crossing I-40 at Choctaw Road and crossing Turner Turnpike near Triple XXX. The loop would connect with I-35 north of Edmond.

Y Corridor: Would connect with the Kilpatrick Turnpike as it crosses I-40 at Sara Road. The highway would extend east and south, crossing I-44 near Meridian and Telephone Road at Tecumseh Road. The loop would head east and north, crossing I-40 near Henney and Choctaw roads before meeting with the Turner Turnpike between Hiwassee and Anderson. The highway would turn west near Waterloo and connect with I-35.

X Corridor: Would connect with the Kilpatrick Turnpike as it crosses I-40 at Sara Road. The highway would curve east and south, like Corridors Y and Z, before crossing I-44 near Meridian and Telephone Road near Tecumseh Road. The loop would follow Anderson Road to NE 23 before extending south to Henney at NE 23. The route would cross I-44 near Anderson before connecting at I-35 north of Edmond.

Hearing on outer loop proposal draws crowd

► Many area residents upset by state's proposals for new highway

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

More than 300 people — many of whom reside in the rural area between Norman and Lake Thunderbird — crowded into the Moore-Norman Technology Center's Seminar Center Tuesday night to learn how their lives might be affected, or uprooted, by construction of an outer loop highway surrounding the metro area.

The public meeting was part of a \$375,000

study by the Oklahoma Transportation Department, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments to identify the location of a future transportation corridor and preserve land for road construction.

Marc Long, vice president of Cobb Engineering, one of three engineering firms commissioned to perform the study, said "Relieving congestion on the existing highway network is of utmost importance" in construction of the outer loop.

Long presented four proposals adopted by a steering committee composed of two members each from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

Those four routes, two-mile corridors design-

nated as Corridors X, Y, Z and F, will be narrowed to one after a more detailed study regarding the routes' economic and environmental impacts, Long said.

Much of the loop's northern and western segments have been established by the Kilpatrick Turnpike and its western extension, which already is under construction.

Corridors X, Y and Z would carry the loop across Norman's north side at Tecumseh Road before turning back north toward Midwest City and Choctaw.

Much of the criticism voiced Tuesday night concerned Corridor F, which would include the H.E. Bailey Turnpike Spur connecting with Highway 9, travel eastward across I-35 where a high-

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way would be constructed to run south of the South Canadian River, before turning northward through rural land between Norman and Lake Thunderbird at 60th Avenue Southeast.

In oftentimes heated debate, residents asked why a previous proposal for a corridor to run east of Lake Thunderbird was stricken from the list of four alternatives.

Long responded that the route would not collect enough traffic to relieve congestion on I-35.

Others criticized study evaluations based upon the 1990 Census, which fails to include recent development east of Norman.

Norman resident Lonnie Kennedy said highway construction in east Norman risked contamination of the watershed supplying Lake Thunderbird and the Garber-Wellington Aquifer.

A Choctaw resident endorsed the "no build" alternative, saying "we're not spending enough time and resources to improve the roads we've got."

One angry resident said highway construction would destroy all he'd "sweated, worked and saved" to build.

"I moved east of Norman to get away from the city," he said, to a round of thunderous applause.

Admitting he was in the minority of project supporters at Tuesday night's meeting, Norman resident Bill Curry said: "Traffic is so congested, the need for the loop is already there."

"Norman is the state's third largest city and it should be within the loop. F Corridor is appropriate and I think it's needed," he added.

Long said the advisory and steering committees would continue to study the proposals before deciding on a final corridor route next spring.

"No plan is in place for imminent construction of the highway," Long said.

Long said residents could voice concerns to the state transportation department, 521-6433; OTA, 425-3600; or ACOG at 848-9861. For additional information, contact the Outer Loop web site at www.outerloop.com.

Reporter Tom Blakey covers city government. He can be reached at 366-3540.

Thursday,
Dec. 17, 1998

Norman
transcript

OF

Our view

► OUTER LOOP

Outer Loop committee ignoring Norman's welfare

The Chamber of Commerce and the city want some answers from state planners on why Norman's input is being ignored on the Outer Loop study project. We, too, want to know why the study committee is ignoring the welfare of the fourth largest city in this state.

Our community put considerable time and thought into the Norman 2020 plan and developed a sensible blueprint for the city's future. The 2020 plan took into account the environmentally fragile nature of the area between the urbanized core of Norman and Lake Thunderbird, choosing to limit development of that rural area. A plan to route 30,000 trucks a day through that area hardly fits with the plan and would imperil the Garber-Wellington Aquifer, which supplies drinking water for Norman and the surrounding area.

Also devastating for the city would be any attempt to route the Outer Loop along Highway 9. The highway is vital to the south part of the city, and no reasonable east-west alternative route is available for residents of that area. Providing enough on-ramps for those residents to use the route would destroy its effectiveness as a bypass, and Lindsey Street does not have the capacity to handle the overflow. Morning and evening rush hour traffic would be horrendous, and OU game days would be a nightmare. Already known as a death trap, Highway 9 would claim more lives as traffic increased. A proposal to take part of the loop south of the river helps, but it only goes as far as the area of Hwy. 77, still having an impact on environmental and growth concerns in the

east between Tecumseh and Franklin roads and head north about 108th Ave. NE where they would separate and terminate at I-35 north of Edmond. "Corridor F" would start at the Kilpatrick Turnpike, go south to the H.E. Bailey Turnpike Spur, east along Highway 9 to I-35 and run south of the Canadian River, then turn north through rural land between Norman and Lake Thunderbird, crossing the Turner Turnpike to connect with I-35 north of Edmond.

Complicating the matter is the I-35 NAFTA bypass proposal, which Norman residents also want to go east of Lake Thunderbird. However, with the loop as proposed, that traffic would almost certainly be funneled into the outer loop, worsening the situation. Like a pair of conjoined twins, these "separate" issues are inextricable.

More than 300 people attended the public meeting at Moore Norman Technology Center last week and voiced overwhelming disapproval of both proposals for the Outer Loop. Mayor Bob Thompson and Chamber of Commerce President Mike Pullin wrote a joint letter to members of the Outer Loop Study Committee June 25 which has not yet been answered.

It appears likely that the loop will be built, with or without the consent of the people. The state Supreme Court recently upheld a \$300 million state highway bond issue without a public vote, and the Turnpike Authority also has the power to issue bonds and build the loop as a turnpike. We dare not wait for the project to come to a vote before voicing our opposition, because that vote may never come. Now is the time to

East of lake loop proposal back on track

► Revised route
lies south of State
Highway 9, east of
Lake Thunderbird

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

The Outer Loop Steering Committee — after loud public outcry from Norman residents — has placed a previously considered highway alternative back on the table for further consideration. The revised and revived alternative route — corridor Zz — lies south of State Highway 9 and east of Lake Thunderbird.

Planners are conducting a \$375,000 outer loop feasibility study to identify the location of a future transportation corridor and preserve land for road construction. Portions of the loop are not expected to be constructed for at least 20 years.

Corridor Zz brings to five the number of options which advisory and steering committees will study before deciding on a final corridor route next spring.

State Transportation Secretary Neal McCaleb announced the decision in a meeting with Norman Chamber of Commerce officials Monday.

"I'm pleased the alternative was put back into consideration, and that trans-

portation officials are listening to the concerns of Norman residents, the business community and city leaders," said chamber Transportation Committee chairman Alan Hendrick.

Hendrick and chamber vice president for economic development Jim Wade arranged for the face-to-face meeting with McCaleb in order to get a response to a June 25 letter sent McCaleb by Mayor Bob Thompson and chamber president Mike Pullin. In the letter, Thompson and Pullin protested any outer loop route passing through the environmentally sensitive region between Norman and Lake Thunderbird.

Thompson and Pullin also recommended that a proposed I-35 bypass from the Purcell-Wayne area be routed east of Lake Thunderbird, and protested the use of any part of Highway 9 within the Norman city limits as part of the outer loop or the I-35 bypass.

The corridor Zz proposal previously utilized Highway 9 east of I-35, but has been revised in its resurrected form. It now plots construction of a highway south of the Canadian River in the vicinity of Post Oak Road. The highway would extend east from I-35 and turn north on the east side of Lake Thunderbird, eventually connecting with I-35 north of Edmond to complete a circle around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Much of the

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Loop: Alternative plan to Outer Loop back on track

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loop's northern and western segments have been established by the Kirkpatrick and Turner turnpikes.

Of the other options, the X, Y and Z corridors are designed to begin in the far western metropolitan area where Kirkpatrick Turnpike and I-40 eventually will connect, travel south and east along Norman's north side between Tecumseh and Franklin roads, then turn north at about 108th Avenue Northeast, crossing Turner Turnpike and connecting with I-35 north of Edmond.

Corridor F would bring the loop farther south to the H.E. Bailey Turnpike Spur, travel east along Highway 9 to I-35, where a highway would be built south of the Canadian River. The loop would then turn north through rural land between Norman and Lake Thunderbird, crossing the Turner Turnpike and terminating at I-35 north of Edmond.

More than 300 Norman residents, many residing in the rural area east of the city — voiced their protests to the F corridor at a Dec. 8 public meeting in Norman. City officials say the F corridor is contrary to Norman's

2020 growth plan, which protects the land and environment around Lake Thunderbird.

The region serves as a watershed for Lake Thunderbird and the Garber-Wellington Aquifer, the source of Norman's water supply.

According to transportation officials, the amended Zz alternative addresses those concerns.

"Citizens also expressed concern about the width of the proposed alternatives — the study encompasses a two-mile-wide swath," ODOT officials stated in a press release issued Tuesday.

"The actual loop will only require 800 feet for the highway's width, roughly one-tenth of the study area. The exact placement within the two-mile-wide section will be determined based on which will cause the least impact to the environment, residents and businesses."

Study committee officials brought forward the Zz proposal after it was dropped from the list of alternatives in November. According to ODOT officials, the plan had scored as fifth highest of the highway alternatives in the preliminary evaluation process,

but had been "eliminated due to cost and mobility factors."

The steering committee is comprised of two members each from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

"I appreciate the planners putting that option back in for further study," said Norman Mayor Bob Thompson. "Moving the loop east of Lake Thunderbird goes a long way in preserving the ecologically sensitive area of east Norman. It also provides a much better route for truck traffic, relieving the congestion on I-35."

A revised map of the five alternative routes is being prepared by Cobb Engineering Company, one of three engineering firms commissioned to perform the study.

Residents can voice their concerns to the state transportation department, 521-6433; OTA, 425-3600; or ACOG at 848-9861. For additional information, contact the Outer Loop web site at www.outerloop.com.

Reporter Tom Blakey covers city government and can be reached at 366-3540.

Highway Plan Concerns Readers

By Christy Watson
Staff Writer

George McCown is worried about his peaceful drive.

Clovis Davis doesn't want extra noise.

Kathleen Huffman doesn't want her parents to fret.

Kim Lambert wants to keep her house.

Their concerns were echoed by about 60 metro area residents who called or e-mailed *The Oklahoman* to share their thoughts about a proposed highway to surround the metro area.

Transportation officials recently announced four possible corridors for the highway, commonly referred to as the outer loop. Last week, a steering committee studying the outer loop added another proposal to its list of possible alignments.

Corridor ZZ travels east along State Highway 9 to Luther Road.

Only one corridor will be selected for the highway, but making that decision could be difficult.

The proposals drew a variety of responses from people who attended two public meetings in Edmond and Norman.

Many Norman residents were outraged by one proposal, identified as Corridor F, that runs south of SH 9 and east between Norman's rural area and Lake Thunderbird.

Many south Oklahoma City residents are equally opposed to Corridors X, Y and Z, which run through south Oklahoma City before crossing Interstate 35 about one-half mile south of Franklin.

Callers to *The Oklahoman* expressed mostly confusion about the process of choosing a highway alignment and were worried about whether the road would wipe out their homes and go through their land.

"I am considering moving out to the country, but my decision may need to be based on where the highway will be," wrote Isabelle Billen. "I don't want to move to the country only to have a busy highway within one-half mile of my house."

The highway is an emotional issue for those whose houses could be in its path.

"I do not want this going through. I bought my home deliberately away from major traffic," said Lou Powell Leonard. "This would be coming straight over my house."

Kathleen Huffman said her family has lived in the Choctaw area for nearly 30 years and fears a highway would disrupt the lives of her and her parents.

"I can handle it, I'm sure. But I worry for my elderly parents who thought their home would be safe for years to come."

Despite their confusion, transportation officials urge homeowners to be patient.

"We don't have a direct pipeline to the 1 million people that are there," said Zach Taylor, executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments. "We will continue to work with the metropolitan area media, through our Web site and public meetings to try to make every effort so that every affected party can have their input."

ACOG, along with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, are sponsoring a yearlong study to pinpoint a route for the highway.

The \$375,000 study is being conducted by Cobb Engineering of Oklahoma City.

Officials describe the study as a long-range planning effort to preserve right of way for a highway designed to relieve growing congestion from other metro roadways.

State transportation department spokeswoman Terri Angier said the public's input is vital to choosing a highway location.

"Frankly, the public involvement process can be extremely productive if used properly," Angier said.

Public opinion is the reason why Corridor ZZ will be considered by the outer loop advisory and steering committees, she said.

Those who have an opinion are either strongly for or against some form of a loop highway.

"Oklahoma City residents do not need any more poorly maintained highways to speed around on," wrote one unidentified person. "Why should the state want to ruin the serenity of the rural areas?"

Paula Seals of Moore agrees.

"Too many homes and families will be uprooted by these plans," she said.

Those studying an outer loop, including a 70-member advisory committee made up of city officials and business and civic leaders, have considered more alternatives than those presented.

Beginning early last year, more than 50 high-

way routes were reviewed. Options that did not include building a new highway were also considered. Those proposals were to build a commuter rail service; to initiate an express bus service; to widen existing highways; and to create high vehicle occupancy lanes.

The advisory and steering committees, in a series of meetings, decided the nonhighway options alone would not sufficiently relieve traffic congestion.

In a September report outlining each of the highway routes and other alternatives, Cobb Engineering officials predicted not building a new highway could worsen existing traffic congestion and contribute to air quality problems.

Several people who attended a December public meeting in Edmond, and some who called *The Oklahoman*, favored a commuter rail system.

"I believe that if enough study is done, bus service or light rail systems will be found to be much cheaper than the highway route," said Oklahoma City resident James Eubank.

Those who agree a highway is needed were split between Corridors F and X. Corridor F is proposed south of SH 9, while Corridor X would run through south Oklahoma City and east of the metro near Choctaw and through Jones.

Frustration has also stemmed from the width of the corridors.

Each of the corridors represents a 2-mile-wide area where a highway could be built.

However, that's about 10 times more land than needed to build a road, said state transportation department spokeswoman Angier.

"The reason we're studying a two-mile area is so that we can find the place with the least impact on homeowners and the environment."

Before a final location is picked, engineering and transportation officials will conduct detailed studies on the environment of each corridor, looking for obstacles such as federal wetlands.

Callers who said they favor a loop are almost equally divided between Corridors F and X. Corridor ZZ had not yet been introduced when metro area residents phoned in their comments.

No callers said they favored Y, while a few said they favored Z because the corridor extends further east than X and Y.

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■ Your Views *Johnny Deen*

@trucker.af.m.

Sunday Oklahoman 12-20-98

Outer Loop Meets Outer Limits

TO THE EDITOR:

On Dec. 8, I attended a public meeting on a proposal to build a six-lane highway south of the Oklahoma City metropolitan area termed "the Outer Loop." This expressway has been laid out in a manner that will adversely affect thousands of people's lives, property and quality of life, not to mention the potential effects on underground aquifers and the watershed. There was a meeting in Edmond the previous night. The anemic approach to public notification of this project smacks of secrecy and avoidance of public dissent. Many of the communities and residents who live in the target area of this project know nothing of it.

The 500 or 600 people in attendance at the Norman meeting were unanimous in opposition to the proposal. I believe the opposition could easily number in the tens of thousands. There were several alternatives presented. They were all bad ideas. The mantra used to rally support was "we need to do something before it's too late." The goal is to have the Outer Loop in place by 2020. If this is all they can come up with, it's already too late. The study group should be scuttled and a new process put in motion. The message is, don't try to cram this down our throat.

John Deen, Norman

City Council should adhere to 2020 plan for 'outer loop'

To the editor:

There will be a citizen's meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Norman Public Library to discuss ways of stopping the craziness of the state's various "outer loop" highway plans for east Norman. You can bet I will be there, and I urge all concerned to attend.

I do not support any of the state's proposed highway routes. I believe that if there is going to be a loop at all, it must be limited to the route designated by the Norman 2020 Land Use and Transportation Plan, which was approved by the the Norman City Council in February and March of 1997 by resolutions R-9697-57 and R-9697-70. I do not believe there is a need at all for an outer loop, especially through the peaceful and environmentally fragile east Norman countryside.

The planning department at City Hall provides free copies of the 2020 maps to the public, and I suggest that everyone get one. It clearly shows an "outer loop" starting at Indian Hills Road and 48th Avenue Southwest, angling south and crossing Interstate-35 between Tecumseh Road and Franklin Road, then traveling eastward on the south side of the Little River until reaching 36th Avenue Southeast, at

which point it angles sharply north and ... the Norman city limits between 48th Avenue Southeast and 60th Avenue Southeast.

This route was chosen and approved after much thoughtful study and research by city officials and various citizens' groups. This establishes a legal precedent to which the state and federal land grabbers must be held ... and the route of the 2020 plan certainly isn't 2 miles wide.

It is my position that the route described in the in the Norman 2020 plan is the only viable option. No X, no Y and no Z. Period. I believe if the people of Norman can coordinate and put pressure on the City Council and other officials, we can put a stop to this madness.

The Norman City Council will meet soon to decide the city's official position on the "outer loop" proposals. I hope their decision is in alignment with what the city planner Richard Massie said at Norman's first public "outer loop" meeting. He said the route described in Norman's 2020 plan was the only route with which he agreed.

Pressure should be put on City Council members to continue their support for the 2020 plan.

— Michele Moore
Norman resident

Oklahoma Daily, 1-11-99

THE NORMAN OKLAHOMAN

NORMAN, OK

The Daily Oklahoman

ZZ Corridor Back on Map *Plan Puts Road East of Lake*

By Chip Minty
Staff Writer

Loud opposition to a proposed interstate highway through rural east Norman was enough to get the attention of state planners, but ultimately, it may not be enough to stop the road construction.

That's the opinion of Alan Hendrick, chairman of the Norman Chamber of Commerce transportation committee.

He is working to keep a proposed highway loop out of the rural area west of Lake Thunderbird.

Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Neal McCaleb told Hendrick last week that highway planners are aware of strong public sentiment against the route through east Norman and they have responded to it.

A committee overseeing a study to determine the loop's future path has added a fifth route, called Corridor ZZ, that would bypass the area dotted with homes.

The new proposal would carry traffic south of State Highway 9 and east of Lake Thunderbird.

The highway would be part of a future loop system around the Oklahoma City area.

SEE LOOP PAGE 4 ►



— Staff Photo by Ty Russell

The study of possible routes for a future loop around the Oklahoma City area shows land northeast of 48th Avenue and State Highway 9 is under consideration for a four-lane interstate highway. Residents say a road there would disturb the rural setting that drew them to the area.

12-30-98

Loop

◀ FROM PAGE 1

Portions of the loop already in place or under construction include the Kilpatrick Turnpike in north Oklahoma City and the H.E. Bailey Spur turnpike west of Norman.

The portion carrying traffic around Norman and the eastern fringes of Oklahoma City is projected for construction some time within the next 20 years. No funding is in place for the work.

Highway planners had dropped Corridor ZZ from the list of possible routes last month but added it back last week.

That decision came after residents in east Norman protested the proposed F corridor, which would carry traffic west of the lake between 48th Avenue E and 72nd Avenue E.

"We were pleased to hear they put that (Corridor ZZ) back into consideration," said Hendrick, who met with McCaleb and other Norman business leaders Dec. 22.

However, Hendrick said Corridor F, west of the lake, has not been dropped from consideration, and the ultimate decision will not hinge on what residents say.

He said highway planners face opposition from residents no matter where they decide to build roads.

But public sentiment in Norman has been a powerful influence, said Marc Long, an Oklahoma City consulting engineer conducting the \$350,000 route study for the state and Oklahoma City area communities.

"The key to ZZ is there was a lot of public concern," he said.

A six-member steering committee representing the Oklahoma Turnpike Au-

thority, the Oklahoma Transportation Department and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments is overseeing the study.

Long said Corridor ZZ scored high in his study but was a distant fifth behind the top four options presented in public hearings early this month.

Those routes included F, as well as three other routes that follow two-mile corridors near Franklin, Tecumseh and Rock Creek roads in north Norman.

The three northern routes drew little public opposition.

Long said ZZ and other possibilities had been eliminated after being judged for ecological and archeological impact as well as land features and demographics.

Now, however, Corridors ZZ, F and the other three options have an equal chance of selection, he said.

The final phase of the study will focus on zoning and current land use along the proposed routes.

Long said those are factors that could distinguish ZZ as a stronger candidate than F or any of the other options.

Pat Copeland, assistant director of comprehensive planning for the city of Norman, called the decision a step in the right direction.

Copeland, who is on a 70-member advisory committee for the loop study, expressed concern about corridor F during a meeting in November.

"It's good to know they're listening to comments," he said. "That's always encouraging."

THROWN FOR A LOOP

Following are answers to several questions posed by metro area residents concerning the proposed outer loop:

Q: How were the proposed alignments selected?

An advisory committee of city officials and business and civic leaders have been meeting for nearly a year to review possible routes for the highway. A steering committee of officials from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority will make the final decision as to whether a highway will be built and will determine its location.

Q: When will a final decision on the highway be made?

Transportation and engineering officials are scheduled to choose one route next spring. Public meetings will be held after a route is selected.

Q: When will the highway be built?

Transportation officials have said 2020 is a realistic date for possible construction. Officials describe the current study as a long-range-planning effort to preserve right of way for the highway.

Q: Is there money to build the highway?

No. No money has been set aside for the project but the highway could be built whenever funding becomes available. Transportation officials have not discarded the idea of making the outer loop a turnpike.

Q: How will right of way be acquired?

That will not be decided until a route is selected. Transportation officials have said restrictive zoning or special legislation could be used to preserve land. However, they have not said how the state would acquire land from existing homeowners and businesses.

Q: When are the next public meetings?

The next public meetings are tentatively scheduled for next spring. However, a special public meeting could be scheduled early next year because of the new corridor added to the list of possible routes.

Q: How do I show my support or protest one of the proposed corridors?

To share your comments, call the state transportation department at 521-6433; ACOG at 848-8961; or the turnpike authority at 425-3600.

The transportation department can add your name to a mailing list to receive regular updates about the study. Information about the outer loop may also be obtained on the Internet at www.outerloop.com.

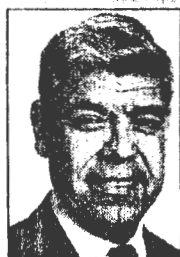
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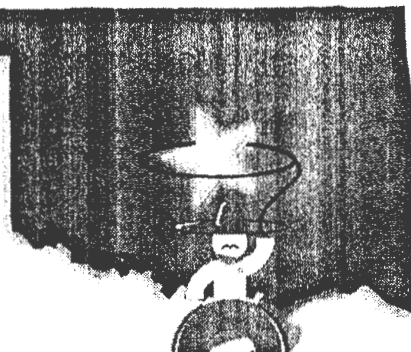
BUSINESS

B

The Outer Loop Flood of comments staggering



McCaleb



By Randall Turk
Transcript Business Editor

An imaginary line designating a possible route for the new metro area "Outer Loop" is back on the map at the state Department of Transportation.

"Alternative Zz" would stab south from the Kilpatrick Turnpike, take in the "Norman Spur" of the H.E. Bailey Turnpike, plow east along Post Oak Road and then turn north about a mile east of Lake Thun-

derbird to connect with the Turner Turnpike and I-35. The route, one of five being considered, was reinstated in response to Norman residents objecting to its deletion from the plan, highway officials said.

The earlier elimination of the Zz route from the list of options might be an indication it will not fare well during later evaluation by transportation experts. Transportation officials said previously that taking the loop east of Lake Thunderbird would not collect enough traffic to relieve

a congested I-35.

Transportation Department officials say public input is important to the planning process, although none can say just how much clout public opinion carries, compared to other factors. Public response has been heavy, they say.

Secretary of Transportation Neal McCaleb said he had reservations about deleting Zz from the list of optional routes,

► See **LOOP** Page B2

NORMAN BUSINESS

American Laser Solutions always ahead of change

Loop: Flood of comments said to be staggering

► Continued from Page B1

and raised questions about it during a Dec. 22 meeting of the Steering Committee. "We were advised the four Norman representatives on the 70-member Advisory Committee had voted for the four routes being considered," McCaleb said.

Transportation officials affirmed that, at an earlier meeting of the advisory committee, Norman representatives raised no objections to eliminating the proposed loop alignment east of Lake Thunderbird. But from the public response, McCaleb said "It appeared to the Steering Committee that it would be advisable to put back Zz."

On Dec. 23, McCaleb met with representatives of the Norman Chamber of Commerce and announced the Zz option had been restored to the list of routes still under consideration.

The chamber and the City of Norman have pointed out that the city's 2020 growth plan acknowledges the sensitive nature of the rural environment west of Lake Thunderbird, where one of the optional routes would cross. Norman officials also have recommended that a proposed I-35 bypass from the Wayne-Purcell area should be routed east of the lake.

McCaleb said an additional problem involves the overutilization of I-35. In 20 years, I-35 will bear twice the traffic it carries now, he said. "Research from NAFTA Coalition shows there's a relationship between the I-35 bypass and the outer loop," he said.

Comment still sought

Transportation officials are still accepting public comments, but specific observations that provide direction are preferred. Citizens seeking information or voicing concerns about the Outer Loop proposals can contact the state Transportation

Department, 521-6433; the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority, 425-3600, or the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, 848-8961. All the proposed routes are displayed on the Outer Loop website at: www.outerloop.com

The bypass would begin near Wayne where a customs center, the "Mid-Continent Gateway Project," is proposed. The legislature has appropriated \$1 million for a study into the feasibility of the customs checkpoint, where trucks from Mexico would receive clearance for passage through the state.

Will the Outer Loop be a turnpike or a freeway? McCaleb said the decision won't be made for perhaps another 20 years, when funding for the project is needed. But he said the Department of Transportation has limited funds to maintain the state's 12,500 miles of public highways. "We've already committed \$100 million to six-lane I-35 from the Dallas junction to Moore," he said. "The Turnpike Authority has been a viable alternative to using highway funds."

"In the last 50 years, if you take out the Interstate system, Oklahoma has built only four miles of limited access,

grade separated state highways."

Turnpikes already comprise the first legs of the Outer Loop, so "it seems reasonable the Turnpike Authority will be a player," McCaleb said. Much of the groundwork for the Outer Loop study was completed for a turnpike program proposed by former governor David Walters.

The plan failed to gain legislative support.

McCaleb acknowledged that public input in the highway planning process "is not a democratic poll. Public input is taken into consideration, but the public is not in a position to make enlightened judgment about traffic modeling."

He also indicated that public opinion about road projects has grown in significance over the years. "When the interstate system was started in Oklahoma in 1956, there was no public input. We just picked the route with the least cost. We made a lot of public

enemies."

McCaleb says the state's primary transportation mission is "providing the capacity to accommodate the traffic that presents itself." He said his priorities include determining the most effective routes and building roads "the right way, the first time. We have to balance that against environmental and social considerations. A lot of times, that's mutually exclusive."

As for the five optional Outer Loop routes, he said the state may well follow the Oklahoma City Area Regional Transportation Study recommendations. "But that should not foreclose looking at other options."

Transportation Department officials say they have been inundated by calls and correspondence since a Dec. 8 public meeting in Norman, when four paths for the Outer Loop through the city were disclosed.

McCaleb anticipates the final route will be determined sometime this spring. Another public meeting in Norman is anticipated in April. Once the plan is finalized, the Transportation Department will devise strategies for preserving right-of-way for the road over the next 20 years.

"The feasibility study is just the beginning," said Sam Shehab, planning division manager for the Transportation Department. "We must complete an environmental impact study showing the exact impacts the road will have on the community. Then the public will have another chance to take a crack at it."

FRONT PAGE

City Council to express preferences for location of proposed outer loop

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

Transcript
1-10-99

Norman City Council members will vote Tuesday on a resolution concerning the City of Norman's preferences for the location of an outer loop in the Norman area.

The council meets at 5:30 p.m. in the Lowry Room of the Norman Public Library, 225 N. Webster.

State officials and highway planners are conducting a feasibility study to identify the location of a future transportation corridor which would complete a circuitous route around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area. Advisory and steering committees are studying five route options before deciding on a final corridor route next spring. Portions of the loop are not expected to be constructed for at least 20

years, according to transportation officials. Also under study by transportation officials is an I-35 Trade Corridor Bypass which would route truck traffic around the OKC metropolitan area.

The resolution opposes any routing of the outer loop and/or trade corridor in the area between urban Norman and Lake Thunderbird because of its "negative social, economic and environmental impacts."

Further, the resolution states: "... the City of Norman supports Alternatives X, Y or Z since such routing ... would be wholly consistent with the City's adopted Norman 2020 Land Use and Transportation Plan.

"... (I) f the above described facilities cannot be assured, then the City of Norman would support, as being the next best

► See **VOTE** Page A2

TWICE THE TALK TIME FOR 2

Vote: Loop plans on City Council agenda

► Continued from Page A1

option, the Modified Outer Loop Alternative Zz, which goes east of Lake Thunderbird and does not utilize the existing State Highway 9."

From where the Kilpatrick Turnpike will connect with I-40, the X, Y and Z routes are designed to travel south and

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► OUTER LOOP

Voice your opinion on the Loop

Time is running short for making your opinion on the Outer Loop known, but some opportunities remain.

The Norman City Council will vote Tuesday evening on a resolution opposing placement of the Outer Loop or the NAFTA trade corridor bypass between urban Norman and Lake Thunderbird. The resolution supports alternative X, Y or Z, which would go along the north side of Norman, as consistent with the city's 2020 Land Use and Transportation Plan. The Council of Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma City Airport Authority already have expressed an official preference for the XYZ route.

The Outer Loop Steering Committee is accepting public comment until Jan. 15. You can call the Oklahoma Department of Transportation at 521-6433, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority at 425-3600 or the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments at 848-9861. Information is available on the Outer Loop web site at www.outerloop.com.

Contact your council member, call your state senator or representative, speak to the steering committee organizations, get on the web site or all of the above, but be sure you make your opinion known. The placement of the Outer Loop is an issue that will affect all of us, and we all deserve to be heard.

Speak up about 'outer loop' craziness

Editor, The Transcript:

There will be a citizens' meeting Wednesday, Jan. 13, 7 p.m., at the Norman Public Library to discuss ways of stopping the craziness of the state's various "outer loop" highway plans for east Norman.

You can bet I will be there, and I urge all concerned to attend.

I do not support any of the state's proposed highway routes.

I believe that if there is going to be a loop at all, it must be limited to the route designated by the Norman 2020 Land Use & Transportation Plan which was approved by the Norman City Council in February and March of 1997 by Resolutions R-9697-57 and R-9697-70.

I do not believe that there is a need at all for an outer loop designed to funnel 30,000 heavy NAFTA trucks per day from Mexico to Canada — especially through the peaceful and environ-

mentally fragile east Norman countryside.

The planning department at City Hall provides free copies of the 2020 maps to the public, and I suggest that everyone get one.

It clearly shows an "outer loop" starting at Indian Hills and SW 48th, angling south and crossing I-35 between Tecumseh and Franklin, then traveling eastward on the south side of the Little River until reaching SE 36th, at which point it angles sharply north and leaves the Norman city limits between SE 48th and SE 60th.

This route was chosen and approved after much thoughtful study and research by city officials and various citizens' groups.

This establishes a legal precedent to which the state and federal landgrabbers must be held to....and the route of the 2020 plan certainly isn't two miles wide!

It is my position that the route described in the Norman 2020 plan is the only viable option. No X, no Y, no Z, no F, and no Zz. Period.

I believe if the people of Norman can coordinate and put pressure on the City Council and other officials, we can put a stop to this madness.

The Norman City Council will meet next Tuesday to decide the city's official position on the "outer loop" proposals.

I hope their decision is in alignment with what City Planner Richard Massie said at Norman's first public "outer loop" meeting, at which he stated that the route described in Norman's 2020 plan was the only route with which he agreed.

Pressure should be put on City Council members to continue their support for the 2020 plan.

MICHELE MOORE
Norman

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1-10-99, page A7



Outer loop alternative study opposed

By JAMES COBURN
Sun Staff Writer

Jerry Sochor is outraged with having to defend his rights to keep the home he plans to live in the rest of his life.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation is developing possible sites for building a highway loop around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

And Sochor and other property owners are offended their homes, located near Waterloo Road and Air Depot, are in the path of each of five conceptual routes.

All five of the potential highways would start at the Kilpatrick Turnpike near Mustang. They would travel east through Oklahoma City or Norman, span nine miles through east Edmond, traveling north from Memorial Road to Waterloo Road to finally link to Interstate 35.

"We feel real 'special' that the alternate routes all end right where we sit," said Sochor with sarcasm. "We just feel so chosen."

A year of study

The outer loop study began about a year ago and is sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

From these groups a steering committee has been formed to ultimately choose where the highway will be built.

The Outer Loop Major Investment Study evaluates alternate traffic proposals to help traffic congestion within the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. And the study seeks to identify preservation sites for a future transportation corridor.

Engineering and transportation officials will select one route the spring of 2000. Public meetings will be announced for further discussion of the selection.

Hearing from the landowners

Sochor and his neighbor Susan McCowan say they will definitely

attend any public forum or meeting where those affected by the loop's
See **OUTER LOOP**, Page 12A

construction can be heard.

"This land is my dream purchase," said McCowan of the property she and her husband, George, bought five years ago. Her husband is a safety and occupational health specialist with U.S. Department of Labor.

Their six acres is located at 6601 North Air Depot Blvd., which is just south of Waterloo.

"It's quiet and peaceful — we were so lucky to find this place."

Behind her land runs Cow Bell Creek, which she said she has fought hard to keep clean. A pond with ducks and geese adds to the quaint and rustic atmosphere.

"And all my neighbors have critics."

She loves the privacy of her surroundings, threatened with the advent of the toll road.

"It's really scary to have a road come over my property — or to have even had the plans drawn up on a map," said the 54-year-old homeowner.

And she was astounded that the highway would intersect a natural gas pressurizing station across from her home.

"It's dangerous for the road to come even close to them," she said..

A different view

Edmond City Councilor Steve Knox believes a potential highway would be good for the future of Edmond and that **landowners shouldn't work themselves up over something that hasn't yet been finalized.**

"This is not the time to panic yet," he said about public fears related to the five potential corridors.

Knox is chairman of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments. The association was instrumental in initiating the outer corridor major investment study. He is also a member of the outer loop steering committee.

Knox said none of the primary studies were designed to take into

consideration residential neighborhoods because the environmental impact had to be assessed first.

The goal of future proposals will be to construct the outer loop on affordable undeveloped land.

"It very well may not connect at Waterloo Road," said Knox. "And I wouldn't be surprised to see the corridor concept moved farther north."

Knox said the criteria of any plans has nothing to do with residences — only river crossings and flood issues have been the first concerns.

But the neighbors are livid that the residential and human aspect was not the first point of consideration for the study.

"Before you start studying anything, you at least need to get into a car and drive around to see where you're pointing your arrows," said McCowan.

"If they haven't looked as to where it's going yet, why are they proposing any thing. I am offended that they would even do a study before they would even drive by to see where it was."

Getting the word out

Since she learned of the proposed construction, McCowan has been busy on the phone alerting area home owners.

She fears a final decision for the outer loop will be made soon.

"We all know that if someone is determined to build it, then it is going to be done. I don't want them to purchase my property," said McCowan. "And they wouldn't purchase for what it's worth."

According to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the exact site of the two-mile wide section will be based on a location having the least impact to the environment, residents and businesses.

"It is incredibly easy to be a visionary with someone else's money when they don't have to pay for it," said Sochor.

"And it's a waste of money to have a study that wipes out historic places and land the government can't afford."

Edmond Sun, 1-10-99, Front Page



Jerry Sochor, above, wants to preserve the quality of life he enjoys on his north Edmond home. He feels his rustic homestead is threatened by five proposals for an outer loop which ends near Waterloo road and Interstate 35. The sounds of geese and wildlife which add to the serenity of Susan McCowan's Edmond home would vanish if any of the five proposed outer loop conceptual studies were selected.

JAMES COBURN/The
Edmond Sun



How much, how big

If a highway alignment is the best alternative to the loop, the amount of public rights-of-way needed would be about 800 feet for the highway's width.

An engineering consultant will next begin to look at all residential and business aspects in more detail.

The \$375,000 study is being spearheaded by Cobb Engineering of Oklahoma City. Knox said any input about future alternatives should be directed to Marc Long,

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page 12 A

who oversees the project.

"Persons need to notify him and not me," he said.

The city councilor wants to ease concerns about the false perception of a path of destruction to be spread across east Edmond.

All five of the plans pass through the town of Arcadia. And one of the routes passes through downtown Jones.

"Certainly we're not going to approve that plan," he said.

Edmond subdivisions Blackberry Hills, Covey Run and Hidden Hills are in the conceptual path.

"This is geared to define a regionally preferred path so that the cities through which it goes through can begin to buy right of way to protect the corridor for construction that might occur in 20 years," said Knox.

"It is safe to say that the ultimate location of the corridor will disturb few, if any, homes or neighborhoods."

There is no money allotted for right-of-way purchases either, he said. And right of way will not be made until the route is finalized.

But Sochor said there is an attitude of arrogance with the laws of eminent domain.

"If I was a government official and want your land, then I shall come take your land and build what I please," he characterized the governmental acquisition of land.

"I want to make sure they do

not go over my property or the property surrounding me," said McCowan. "The only way I know how to protect what is mine is to make sure my voice is heard."

Also, Knox said that no funding has yet been identified for the outer loop. And the large cost of routing an outer loop through developed neighborhoods would make the project unfeasible.

"They can tell you there is not funding 'til the cows come home," said Sochor.

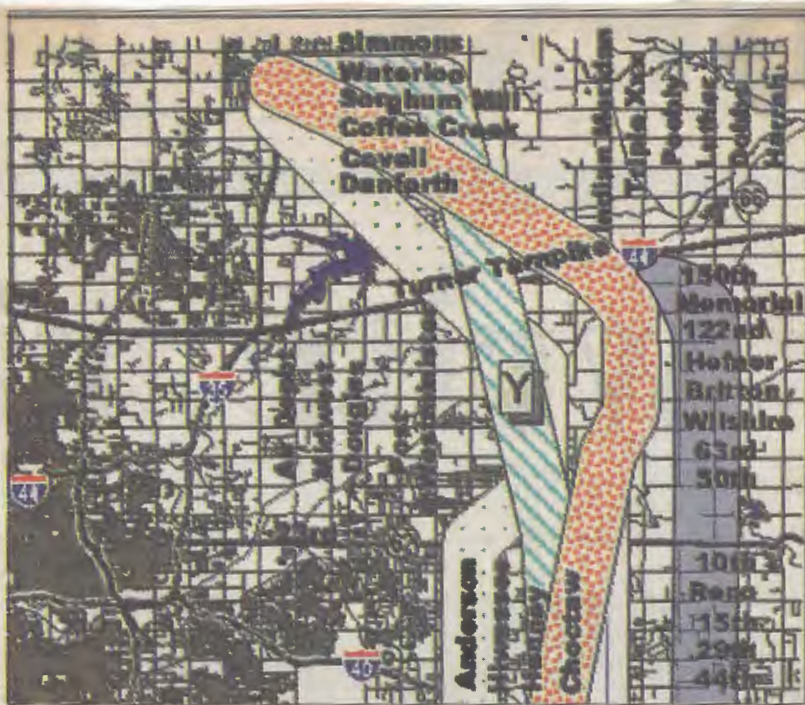
The 54-year-old service contractor moved to the property eight years ago with his wife, Lucie, so she would have a place say "hello" to her horse every morning.

If anyone of the alternate routes is approved for the future, the value of his property would "crater," he

said.

But Knox said an outer loop is a very positive long range step for Edmond.

"It adds a lot of potential to the east side of Edmond."



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page 12A

Five possible corridors for an outer loop highway cross through the Edmond community and end near Waterloo Road and Interstate 35. Farther south, the loop would connect to the Kilpatrick Turnpike to link farther south to the H.E. Bailey Turnpike. From there, routes wrap around east Oklahoma City or Norman before heading north through portions of east Edmond.



JAMES COBURN/Sun Staff Writer

Susan McCowan and her husband, George, were astonished to discover their home to be in the path of an outer traffic loop study. If built, the loop would cross through east Edmond.

Daily OK 1-13-99

Outer Loop Opponents to Meet

By Chip Minty
Staff Writer

A coalition objecting to possible construction of an interstate highway through east Norman will hold its first strategy session tonight at the Norman Public Library, organizer Dave Moore said Tuesday.

"It's basically an organizational meeting to present various ideas and options that may exist and see what else is out there," said Moore, founder of Control the Loop Action Coalition.

He said the meeting also will include a presentation from Norman attorney Robin Stead on land rights and property issues.

Moore's group is organizing out of concern about a study funded through the state and central Oklahoma cities to establish a metropolitan loop system.

So far, the study has narrowed the possible routes to five, which include three on Norman's northern border and one that runs just west of Lake Thunderbird in east Norman. The fifth would be in far east Norman, skirting Lake Thunderbird's east side.

Moore said his group opposes all five of the proposed routes. He said the only route

his group would support is a route which crosses Norman's northwest corner, which already is sanctioned in the city's 2020 master plan.

Moore said hundreds of people from Norman and other communities may attend tonight's meeting because they don't believe their interests are being represented by the study.

Members of the coalition distributed informational fliers last weekend to hundreds of east Norman residents. Many of them were not aware of the possible highway construction.

Residents from east Norman have been among the most outspoken since the project began last spring.

At public hearings last summer and again last month, many said construction of an interstate highway in the area would disrupt the rural environment, pose pollution dangers to Lake Thunderbird and prompt unwanted development.

The coalition meeting will be at 7 p.m. in the library's Lowry Room.

The library is at 225 N Webster Ave.

Meeting: Loop protest planned

► Continued from Page A1

State officials and highway planners are conducting a \$375,000 outer loop feasibility study to identify the location of a future transportation corridor and preserve land for road construction. Portions of the loop are not expected to be constructed for at least 20 years.

Moore said he personally opposes development of the F and Zz corridors, two of five options which advisory and steering committees will study before deciding on a final corridor route next spring.

Both routes would bring traffic south of Highway 9 in the area of Post Oak Road before turning back north — F corridor between urban Norman and Lake Thunderbird and Zz corridor east of Lake Thunderbird.

"The Garber Wellington Aquifer doesn't end at Highway 9," Moore said. "The F and Zz corridors run just two miles south of Highway 9 and sit right on top of that environmentally sensitive region."

Moore said more than 75 people had contacted him in protest of vari-

ous route options, and the Jan. 13 meeting will give participants an opportunity to coordinate their concerns.

Moore said it was his personal opinion "a lot of hard work, planning and money already was spent by the city in developing the Norman 2020 plan, which established where the loop should go."

Moore said the X, Y and Z corridor options roughly correspond with the Norman 2020 plan, which took into consideration ecological, economical and developmental concerns.

The X, Y and Z routes are designed to travel along Norman's north side between Tecumseh and Franklin roads before turning north around 108th Avenue Northeast, crossing Turner Turnpike and connecting with I-35 north of Edmond.

"Thus far, the study contractor as well as the advisory board for this project have shown little regard for Norman's citizenry," Moore said.

Contact: Control The Loop, 1108 W. Main, Suite 101, Norman 73069, or call Moore at 579-7880.7

Transcript 1-5-99

Outer Loop protest meeting scheduled

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

A citizens group calling itself the "Control The Loop Action Coalition" has formed to share concerns regarding the development of a future transportation corridor in the Norman area.

Its first meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m., Jan. 13, at the Norman Public Library, 225 N. Webster.

Norman resident Dave Moore said he has been overwhelmed with support since helping to establish the protesters group.

"The purpose of the Control The Loop meeting is to consider various ways of stopping this insanity," Moore said. "There's more to life than making lots of money."

See **MEETING** Page A2

Council votes down bypass

Norman citizens spoke out at the City Council meeting Tuesday.

Mike Averill

MIKE@DAILY.OU.EDU

Will the construction of a highway bypass rampage through the rural area of East Norman? Not if the City Council and Norman citizens have a say.

Citizens spoke compellingly against the construction of an I-35 Trade Corridor Bypass and the Outer Loop within Norman city limits at Tuesday's council meeting.

Before the packed house, the council decided to send a proposal of "no build" after a 7 to 2 vote.

The original proposal was to state the city's location preference

regarding the the highway projects. After statements from Norman residents, the council voted to amend.

Councilman Chris Shove proposed the "no build" amendment.

"I think the citizens presented compelling evidence of preserving Norman's quality of life," he said.

The Outer Loop Investment Study (MIS) has been studying the possibilities of building a highway loop around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area. The placement of this highway loop within Norman city limits, particularly between Norman and Lake Thunderbird, upset many residents.

Steve Corfidi, Norman resident, said he doesn't want to see the environment destroyed, and that the government should look at

repairing I-35 before building more roads.

"If this is built, watershed stands to be damaged. Also, the rural character will be totally damaged," Corfidi said. "They should make repair roads and add more lanes before building the loop."

Michele Moore, member of the Control the Loop Active Coalition, expressed her excitement for the amendment.

"I'm ecstatic, we had two major battles and the first one was successful tonight," she said. "Council passing the amended resolution sincerely reflected the will of the Norman people."

Mayor Bob Thompson urged citizens to express their concerns to the Oklahoma Department of Transportation before the Friday cut-off date.

1-13-99
Daily OK

Norman City Council Opposes Outer Loop

By Amy David
Norman Bureau

The Norman City Council approved a resolution Tuesday opposing any of the options proposed for an outer loop.

The resolution had supported three alternatives that follow a line between Franklin and Tecumseh roads in north Norman, or secondarily an alternative south of State Highway 9. But the council amended the resolution to support no building after more than 20 Norman residents voiced concerns.

An outer loop roadway to link all of the metro area is being studied by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, the state Transportation Department and the state Turnpike Authority.

Residents told the

council none of the alternatives was consistent with Norman's land use plan. Residents said any plan would disrupt wildlife, homes and possibly the water supply.

Residents suggested a better bus system, carpooling incentives and roadway improvements would be less obtrusive.

Mayor Bob Thompson opposed changing the resolution but voted to approve it once it was changed.

"I think a 'no' option is not what we need to do. I think we need to be proactive and not be against everything," he said.

Councilman Harold Haralson was one of two members who opposed the resolution. He worried that without city input, state officials will do what they want.

Smith

City Council opposes all Outer

Loop plans

Norman Transcript, 1-13-99, Front Page

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

After critical discussion regarding the outer loop study and proposed routes through the metropolitan area, Norman City Council members Tuesday night approved a resolution in support of the "no build" option.

Council members approved the amended resolution by a vote of 7-2.

with Harold Haralson and Leonard West dissenting.

More than 80 citizens attended the meeting, many of whom own homes and property in east Norman where the highway would be constructed. The three-hour meeting was punctuated with frequent applause for more than 20 speakers who criticized loop construction.

State transportation officials are con-

ducting a \$375,000 Major Investment Study to identify the location of a future transportation corridor segment which would complete a circuitous route around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

Advisory and steering committees are studying five route options before deciding on a final corridor route next spring. The highway would not be funded and constructed for at least 20 years.

according to transportation officials.

Sierra Club spokesman Mike Opitz told council members that the conservation group was satisfied with the MIS study until the latest round of public meetings in December, when officials "glossed over" the non-road options which call for improving mass transit and enhancing the existing road network rather than building new highways.

Declaring that the study's focus had changed from whether the road should be built to where it should be built, Opitz said: "The loop study is biased against non-build solutions. Their proposals are misleading, inaccurate and diversionary."

Another advisory commission member, Tom Elmore of the North American Transportation Institute, told coun-

See LOOP Page A2

► Continued from Page A1

cil members the MIS was "designed to obscure the truth."

"We are at a pivotal stage in the development of our community and your decision had better be a good one. It is one which will affect our children, grandchildren and their children," Elmore said.

Saying the state already itemizes \$11 billion in unfunded highway needs, Elmore added: "It's not their money, it's ours. It's time for us to stand up and take back control of our state."

Patrick Ahern, a 12-year-old resident of east Norman, told council members that highway construction would harm the area's wildlife population.

"As a representative of the future generation, I don't want this highway to be built," he said.

Council Member Chris Shove made a motion to amend the original resolution, which endorsed the X, Y and Z corridor proposals and secondarily endorsed the Zz corridor route, to read: "The City of Norman supports the no-build option." The amendment passed 5-4 with Haralson, West, Kevin Pipes and Mayor Bob Thompson dissenting.

West expressed concern about the city "withdrawing from an approved plan" under study for more than 30 years.

Stressing the demand for adequate roads, West said, "I find the idea of 'no-build' a paradox which doesn't match with the Norman 2020 plan."

Haralson said state officials had the power to build the highway in spite of City Council action, and expressed concern that the council did not select a preferred route.

"In one night we've thrown out a plan that has been a major source of time and study. I'm very concerned with what's going to happen with it. We've made a statement, but we don't have a plan," he said.

But Council Member Shove said the council's ultimate responsibility was in maintaining the integrity of the 2020 plan, which protects the east Norman environment, the Garber-Wellington Aquifer and Norman's water supply.

"Local concerns are what matter most," Shove said.

► Members approve resolution to support 'no build' option

Norman Transcript, 1-14-99, front page

Crowd opposes Outer Loop

► State officials are conducting a study to locate a place for the loop segment

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

If the outer loop protest is a grass-roots campaign, the Norman Public Library was a lush greenbelt Wednesday night.

More than 350 people packed into

the Lowry Room to learn what could be done to stop construction of a future highway segment which would complete a circuitous route around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area.

One of many standing-room-only participants summed up the crowd consensus early on: "I moved out to east Norman to live in the country. Now they want to put a highway through my front yard."

Dave Moore, who with his wife, Michele, founded the Control The Loop Action Coalition two weeks ago, said the meeting was arranged

to discuss ways in which to organize and get things done in an efficient manner.

Coalition members distributed surveys and provided the postage and envelopes needed to get comments concerning the loop to transportation officials by a Jan. 15 deadline.

State officials are conducting a \$375,000 Major Investment Study to identify the location for the outer loop segment. Advisory and steering committees are studying five route options before deciding on a final corridor route next spring. The

highway would not be funded and constructed for at least 20 years, according to transportation officials.

Several MIS advisory committee members shared their misgivings about the study methods.

Sierra Club conservation group spokesman Mike Opitz said the MIS team originally examined and ranked more than 50 solutions to traffic congestion problems.

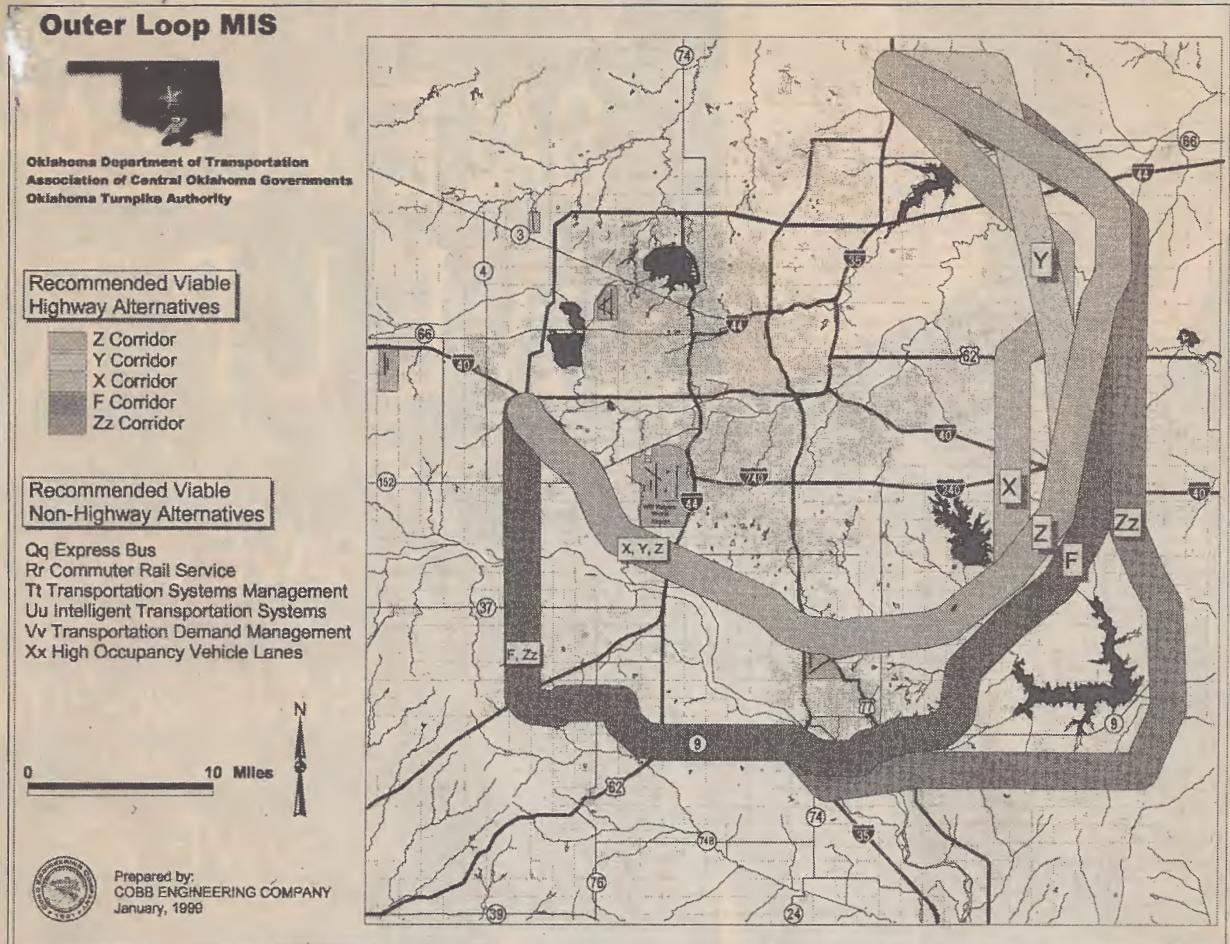
"Within the ranked list, four of the top five options, and seven of the top 11, were non-road solutions," Opitz said.

See **LOOP** Page A4



Photo by John Clanton/CNHI News Services

Members of an overflow crowd fill the Lowry Room at Norman Public Library Wednesday night for discussion of a proposed loop around Norman.



Loop: Crowd speaks out in opposition to plan

► Continued from Page A1

Of the five proposals presented by the MIS steering committee in December, four involve major road construction and one offers a "no-build" solution, calling for no transportation system improvements beyond current commitments.

Opitz said the Zz proposal later was added to the list by transportation officials "to shut up the barking dogs" after initial public outcry.

"The MIS team's December presentations focused media and public attention on road-based solutions," conflicting with the original analysis, Opitz said. "The study is biased in

favor of road construction."

Opitz said the conservation group favors non-road options including enhanced rail and mass transit services and improvements to the existing road network.

"Building more roads will only cause more congestion in the long run, and is not the answer," Opitz said.

Norman attorney Robin Stead urged protesters to organize against the loop immediately, and not when state officials "are knocking on your door."

Stead outlined condemnation procedures used by state officials to buy or seize property under the power of

imminent domain.

"It's not an absolute power ... but the statutes need to be updated to give land owners additional rights," she said.

Stead told a quiet audience that now was the optimum time to pool resources in order to determine the fate — or location — of the loop.

"Later you'll just be arguing over money," Stead said. "Contact your state and federal legislators now — and don't stop on Jan. 15."

Contact: Control The Loop, 1108 W. Main, Suite 101, Norman 73069, 579-7880; or Land Owners Concerned About the Loop, P.O. Box 26242, Oklahoma City, OK 73126, 364-9182.

Examines life of George Cross, OLP's seventh president

Edmond Sun, 1-14-99, Front page

Edmond residents join outer loop protest

By JAMES COBURN
The Edmond Sun
and TOM BLAKEY
Norman Transcript

NORMAN — If the outer loop protest is a grassroots campaign, the Norman Public Library was a lush greenbelt Wednesday night.

More than 350 people, including several from Edmond, packed in to learn what could be done to stop construction of a future highway segment that would complete a circuitous route around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area. A portion of it is planned for East Edmond, running east of Interstate 35, with all five routes possibly ending at Waterloo Road and I-35.

"When your home is threatened, it is intimidating, and people are anxious to take action to remove that threat," said Edmond resident Jane Ashcraft, who attended the meeting. Her Covey Run neighborhood is in the path of the proposals.

What bothers Ashcraft most is that she did not learn of the study directly from transportation officials. A concerned neighbor called her to tell her about the outer loop.

The proposed highway is being studied by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, the state Transportation Department and the state Turnpike Authority.

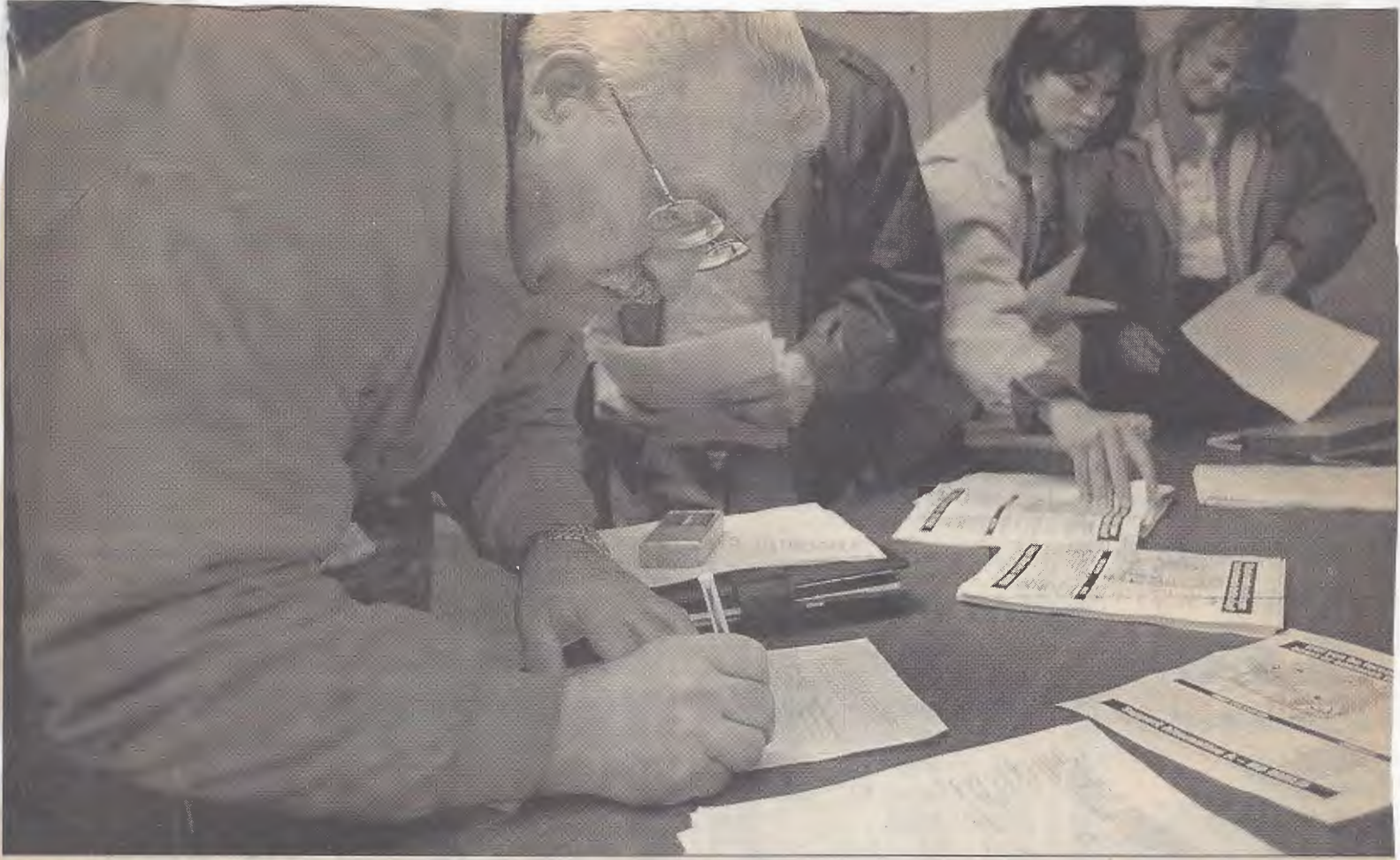
"It occurs to me that there is an obvious effort (by transportation officials) not to give us all the

See **OUTER LOOP**, Page 4



DANA JOHNSON/The Edmond Sun

Jane Ashcraft, who lives in the Covey Run addition in Edmond, videotapes the Outer Loop meeting in Norman Wednesday night. Hundreds of people from different communities attended the meeting, including Jerry Sochor of Edmond, right, in opposition of the proposed Outer Loop corridor.



DANA JOHNSON/The Edmond Sun

Jerry Socher of Edmond signs a petition against the proposed Outer Loop corridor before a meeting in Norman Wednesday night. Hundreds of people from different communities attended the meeting.

OUTER LOOP: Edmond meeting set for Jan. 27

■ From Page 1 *Edmond Sun*, 1-14-99

information about the outer loop," said Edmond resident Jerry Sochor, who also attended Wednesday's meeting.

His property, near Waterloo Road and Air Depot, would be traversed by all five of the possible outer loop routes.

He fears a final decision for the toll road will be made in April, and legal action will be needed to stop the loop.

An Edmond meeting is being planned for Jan. 27 at the Edmond Elks Lodge at 5925 E. Waterloo Road. The meeting time has not been set. The lodge is in the path of the conceptual routes.

The subject of intimate domain and alternative transportation will be addressed at the meeting.

The Edmond residents' concerns were shared by the Norman City Council on Tuesday, when it passed a resolution opposing the five alternative outer loop options.

Both Sochor and Ashcraft said transportation officials should focus on developing responsible stewardship of existing roads in Oklahoma instead of building a new highway.

"Just because the loop is in the works threatens the value of real estate," Ashcraft said.

She knows of homeowners who cannot sell their homes with the uncertainty of a highway threatening their property.

"The thought that if it is not resolved in 10 years is appalling," she said. "What if in five years I wanted to sell my home?"

Much of the loop's northern and western segments already have been established by the Turner and Kilpatrick turnpikes. One of the standing-room-only participants summed up the crowd consensus early on: "I moved out to east Norman to live in the country. Now they want to put a highway through my front yard."

Dave Moore, who with wife Michele founded the Control The Loop Action Coalition two weeks ago, said the meeting was arranged to discuss ways in which to organize a protest group.

Coalition members distributed surveys and provided the postage and envelopes needed to get comments concerning the loop to transportation officials by a Friday deadline.

State officials are conducting a \$375,000 study to identify the location of the outer loop segment. Advisory and steering committees are studying five route options before deciding on a final corridor route next spring. The highway would not be funded and constructed for at least 20 years, according to transportation officials.

Several advisory committee members shared their misgivings with the study methods.

"The study is biased in favor

of road construction," said Sierra Club spokesman Mike Opitz.

Opitz said the conservation group favors non-road options, including enhanced rail and mass transit services and improvements to the existing road network.

"Building more roads will only cause more congestion in the long term and is not the answer," Opitz said.

Norman attorney Robin Stead urged protesters to organize against the loop immediately, and not wait until state officials "are knocking on your door."

"Now is the time to utilize your resources and make a difference," Stead said. "Contact your state and federal legislators now, and don't stop on Jan. 15."

(To contact Control The Loop, write 1108 W. Main, Suite 101, Norman 73069, or call Dave Moore at 579-7880.)

(Blakey is with the Norman Transcript.

Outer Loop Opposed

Residents Try to Prevent Road Construction

Norman, Oklahoma, 1-15-99

By Amy David *front*
and Chip Minty *page*
Staff Writers

Norman area residents who oppose the Outer Loop plan through the city are continuing their efforts to prevent construction within the city limits.

More than 250 residents from 10 communities met Wednesday at the Norman Public Library to discuss a state proposal to build a roadway intended to link the metro area and relieve congestion.

"The public is being directed to focus attention on what route is best.... instead of... do we need a road at all," said Norman resident Michele Moore.

Moore said many of the top solutions found by those studying the concept suggest completing current projects and not building new roads, but she asked, "why isn't that being disclosed?"

"All we had to choose from was these different routes. Now that the preliminary evaluation has been released, it is astonishing that the no-road ways are just not being talked about at all."

Moore said the "Control The Loop Action Coalition" has been asked by other communities to help organize their opposition to the proposed highway.

"One of our main objectives is to make sure the public is aware of the results of the preliminary evaluation of the steering committee. Why do we have to lay more concrete when there are other viable cost-effective options available, and we can't afford to maintain the roads we have?" she said.

Moore was one of more than 20 residents who convinced the Norman City

SEE LOOP PAGE 8 ►



— Staff Photo by Ty Russell

Dave Moore addresses a crowded Lowry Room during a Wednesday night meeting of the Control the Loop Action Coalition to discuss the proposed highway project.

On the Loop

Comments about the proposed Outer Loop highway can be submitted to the state agencies planning the roadway.

Written comments should be mailed to: Planning Division, 200 NE 21st Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73105-3204.

Telephone and fax numbers for the agencies are:

✓ Oklahoma Department of Transportation, phone 521-6433, or fax 521-6917.

✓ Oklahoma Transportation Authority, phone 425-3600, or fax 427-8246.

✓ Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, phone 848-8961, or fax 840-9470.

Internet users can visit the project's Web site at www.outerloop.com.

◀ FROM PAGE 1

Council earlier this week to pass a resolution opposing any of the proposed routes for the road.

Mayor Bob Thompson said he was sure officials will take Norman's resolution into account. But, "Is a no build option a real option?" he asked.

That wasn't one of the options that was presented to us, Thompson said.

"I think a loop is needed for the transportation of the region. Obviously, the routes they proposed to us weren't in harmony with the desires of the citizens."

Moore said the city council vote is more symbolic than anything else.

"We all recognize that little city councils really don't have control and influence over state and federal highway projects."

But Moore said protesters didn't want Norman passing a resolution that wasn't the will of the citizens by approving these routes.

"We are very thankful for what the city council did. We know we can work with them, they are our friends, neighbors and business associates. We want to work with them, and we want them to work with us on being a part of this development without simultaneously wrecking this unique thing that is Norman."

City planner Pat Copeland is a member of one of the committees studying the issue.

The Outer Loop Major Investment Study is being conducted by The Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

Copeland said he couldn't say the loop would absolutely be built.

But, "there can be a loop built whether Norman agrees with it or not. It is not just a Norman issue," Copeland said.

Copeland said he didn't

know where the opposition from Norman residents would leave the plan.

Officials at the state Department of Transportation say they are puzzled by the city council's action Tuesday.

Spokeswoman Terri Angier asked how Norman officials will participate in the process of selecting a route after passing a resolution opposing the loop entirely.

"It's really puzzling because we have been working with the city of Norman on this," Angier said. "We just can't understand why they would want to exclude themselves from the planning process."

Angier said the resolution will effect the study, but it may not have killed the possibility of loop construction in Norman.

Angier said officials conducting the study still welcome calls and faxes from citizens.

She said faxes and letters — even hand-written notes — are of more value than phone calls.

Sam Shehab, the transportation department's outer loop study manager, said the city council's vote contradicts the city's master plan for development.

"It practically discredited their own 2020 land use plan," he said.

That plan calls for a loop through Norman's northwest side.

However, Moore said she doesn't believe that is true.

"You can't throw out the land-use plan by one resolution."

What "no build" means, according the study's steering committee, is that all of the other transportation projects already being planned or under construction should be finished, Moore said.

Councilman Chris Shove

said the integrity of the 2020 plan should be protected, but the public presented some compelling arguments opposing the road.

Shehab said the loop study proposes three routes that follow Norman's northern border.

Norman was one of the leaders in pushing for the loop study in the first place, Shehab said Thursday.

Two years ago, the city asked the state to study a future loop route so it could begin to control land development.

Councilman Mike Tower said he never expected this week's city council meeting to have this outcome.

"Just because we wipe the corridor off the map doesn't mean the study is going to say the same thing."

He said something needs to be worked out that is agreeable to all of Norman, and people should keep in mind the loop proposal is still being planned.

Proposed Outer Loop Corridors



THE NORMAN OKLAHOMAN

NORMAN, OK

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 1999

The Daily Oklahoman

On the Loop

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Outer Loop Opposed Residents Try to Prevent Road Construction

By Amy David
and Chip Minty
Staff Writers

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SEE LOOP PAGE 8 ►



— Staff Photo by Ty Russell

Dave Moore addresses a crowded Lowry Room during a Wednesday night meeting of the Control the Loop Action Coalition to discuss the proposed highway project.

two
100 ps.??

Chamber board members clear on loop stance

► The Chamber's position differs from that of the Norman City Council

By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

Norman Chamber of Commerce board members want their position on the outer loop heard loud and clear:

"We are firmly committed to the Norman 2020 Land Use and Transportation Plan and OCARTS 2020 plan which supports alternatives X, Y or Z of the Outer Loop Study.

"The Modified Outer Loop Alternative Zz is the preferred route in the event that Alternative X, Y or Z are deemed non-viable choices."

So states a letter mailed to Transportation Sec-

retary Neal McCaleb last week by Chamber president Mike Pullin on behalf of board members.

State officials are conducting a \$375,000 Major Investment Study to identify the location of an outer loop segment for development by the year 2020. Advisory and steering committees are studying five route options before deciding on a final corridor route next spring.

The Chamber's position differs from that of the Norman City Council, which last week approved a resolution in support of the "no-build" option, calling for no transportation system improvements beyond current commitments.

"I think the no-build option is not a viable alternative," said Chamber executive director Anna-Mary Suggs. "While it's desirable to promote alternative methods of transportation for people and goods, we realistically believe officials will make a (corridor route) selection.

"Decision-makers are trying to find a way to solve traffic problems for the whole metropolitan

area. By just saying we don't want anything at all, our community may be giving up its ability to express a preference."

The Chamber letter states the I-35 Trade Corridor Bypass "must be on a route east of Lake Thunderbird and avoid the environmentally sensitive areas west of the lake."

"Any use of the existing Highway 9 east of I-35 and a route passing between the urbanized core of Norman and Lake Thunderbird are unacceptable."

The I-35 Trade Corridor Bypass, which would route truck traffic around the greater Oklahoma City metropolitan area, is also under study by transportation officials.

"The Chamber thinks it's best to make a positive response to the MIS with a favored alternative," said Chamber transportation committee chairman Alan Hendrick. "If an alternative is going to be selected, we need to be looking out for the future interests of the community."

Midwest City
Sun
1-21-99,
front
page

► **TRANSPORTATION**

Proposed highway corridors throw some EastOC residents for a loop

By **ROBIN MAXEY**
MANAGING EDITOR

Cretha Taylor wants to preserve her quiet rural neighborhood between Jones and Choctaw.

And she's not alone. Dozens of Eastern Oklahoma County residents have joined the fight against the outer loop.

That's right. *Against.*

The very project which dozens of EastOC leaders have been fighting to get on the Oklahoma Department

of Transportation's drawing board for more than 20 years, has residents upset and shaking their fists.

Taylor and the others are concerned that the 800-foot-wide swath the proposed highway will cut around the southwest, south, east and northeast sides of the metro area will run right through their neighborhoods.

"The worst that could happen, I guess, is that I could lose my home," Taylor said Tuesday. "And even if we don't lose our home - let's say the highway doesn't come right across

here - we'll get the noise and the trash."

Taylor said she and her husband decided to settle in Jones because she sought out a quiet out of the way small town in which to raise her children and in which to live.

"We knew when we moved here we'd have to drive a further distance to go to the doctor and for other things you have in the city," she said. "We opted to drive that extra 30 minutes so that we could have the things that we have here."

All that could be lost if the highway comes to town, she said.

LONG AND WINDING ROAD

State Sen. Dave Herbert, D-Midwest City, and Sam Shehab of the Oklahoma Department of Transportation have been down this road before.

"Anytime you hear about a highway being built you have these kinds of complaints. People don't necessar-

See LOOP page 10

Loop

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ily fear the highway as much as they fear the unknown," Herbert said.

Shehab, the project manager overseeing the outer loop Major Investment Study agrees, explaining that the unknown in this case is being spawned by the known.

What's known is an ODOT map showing five possible corridors the outer loop could take.

On the map each of the corridors is two miles wide.

Some of those opposing the corridors, especially in the Moore and Norman area, have distributed fliers suggesting that ODOT plans to clear a two-mile wide path for the construction or worse.

"Would you believe they intend to take up to two miles on each side of the road?" one flier said. The flier, entitled "Is the State about to seize your home," and others like it have recently surfaced in EastOC. They are, Shehab said, spreading misinformation.

The Major Investment Study, which is being commissioned by ODOT, the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, is being conducted by Cobb Engineering. The study has identified the five corridors and has drawn each of them two miles wide on the map.

"The reason the corridors are two miles wide is so that once a final corridor is determined, we can determine (the highway's) route by identifying an 800-foot wide path for the highway which meets the traffic objectives and will be the least disruptive for residential areas, the environment, wildlife and water resources," Shehab said.

MONEY TALKS

A few years ago, when the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority was

planning the route for the extension of the Kilpatrick Turnpike around the west side of the metro to connect with I-40, farmers called Herbert to complain.

"They knew I was on the (Senate) Transportation Committee and they knew I had fought turnpikes in the past," Herbert said. "They complained that the turnpike was going to cut their farm right in half and it would make part of their farm useless."

Herbert worked with the farmers and, he said Tuesday, they were paid handsomely by ODOT for the right of way.

"(The state) provided (the farmers) access to the portion of their land that was cutoff and even paid them for the loss of the use of the property," Herbert said.

Oklahoma, he said, is among the best states in the region when it comes to compensating land owners for right-of-way.

"You hear a lot of people complaining before the state starts buying up right-of-way but you hardly ever hear any complaints after the right-of-way has been paid for," Herbert said.

He said the state knows which property is most expensive and will route the highway along the path of least resistance.

"They're going to build it where they have to build the fewest number of bridges and have to displace the fewest number of homes," Herbert said. "But even if somebody does lose their dream home in the country, they'll get paid enough for it they can move further out in the country and build themselves another dream home, probably bigger than the first."

The same can be true for those whose homes which are close to the final location of the highway.

"They can sell their land to Texaco or somebody and retire," Herbert said.

LOOK TO THE EAST

Oklahoma County Treasurer Butch Freeman understands people's fears.

Freeman is among EastOC's best known and most influential leaders. He's one of the people that's been working for years on the "eastern loop," which is just a portion of the outer loop project.

"I understand why they're upset. The corridors, most of them, they are talking about aren't far enough east. In all the years I've been working on this we never had any plan that had the highway west of Choctaw Road," Freeman said. Four of the five alternatives have the highway crossing NE 23 near to or west of Choctaw Road.

That's why Freeman endorses the more easterly route favored by Herbert. Alternative ZZ would take the highway south and east of Lake Thunderbird, meaning, at least initially, it would be as far east as Peebly Road.

One EastOC leader said Tuesday he's heard that ZZ is the "flavor of the month" and would take the route east of Jones between Indian Meridian and Peebly Roads.

"East is where it needs to be," Freeman said.

And EastOC needs the highway, he said.

The cities of Choctaw, Harrah, Jones and Luther all live off sales tax revenues.

"They need to broaden their tax bases," Freeman said. "And commerce follows infrastructure. They need this kind of infrastructure."

He's seen first hand what can happen to a town that doesn't have it.

Freeman isn't an Oklahoma native. He was born and raised in McCormick, Mo. You might not find McComb on the map because it was a boom town built along the railroad.

"But when the railroad ceased to be the major mode of transportation, it started to dry up. It's not even there anymore," Freeman said.

EastOC has seen similar things happen. Spencer was once a thriving community, which was hurt some when highways took the place of railroads and hurt a lot when NE 23 was widened to five lanes in the early 1970s. NE 23 and not Spencer-Jones Road is now the major thoroughfare and in recent years even Spencer State Bank, the last remaining major business in downtown Spencer, has moved to a NE 23 locale.

Interstate highways are quickly replacing streets like NE 23, as the main routes for trucks, commuters and travelers.

"You never see a town that dried up and blew away that's along the interstate," another EastOC leader said. "It's always the towns on the old highway that die."

TURN, TURN, TURN

Changes are inevitable.

"The people that moved out to (EastOC) 20 or 30 years ago had to know that eventually the city was going to grow out to them," Freeman said.

Now, it's really coming.

Plans like the Major Investment Study are the only way to make sure that EastOC residents can have a say in where that growth will be, Freeman said.

A few years ago, he added, the leaders in the towns in EastOC got together and agreed that once a corridor was identified they wouldn't zone property in that corridor for residential use.

"That way there wouldn't have to be more homes moved," Freeman said.

Planning growth is the only way to manage it, Herbert explained.

"And urban sprawl, if that's what you want to call it, is happening. It's coming east. It's just the natural course of things. In the Dallas area, the sprawl is growing at a rate of one mile a year."

Cretha Taylor knows the highway will be built someday.

"They're going to do whatever they want to do," she said.

What she wants is to be heard.

"I think the people in Norman were heard. I think they made difference," she said.

EastOC residents will have another chance to be heard in the spring. Shehab said ODOT, OTA and ACOG will sponsor two more public hearings on the outer loop issue. One, thanks to Herbert's urging, will likely be held at EastOC Vo-Tech in Choctaw, Shehab said. But no sites or dates have been selected at this time.

Midwest City
Sun,
1-21-99,
page 10

Norman Transcript, 1-24-89
page A9

Two meetings set this week on outer loop

Local groups protesting construction of an outer loop transportation system have scheduled two public meetings this week.

Concerned Oklahomans for Responsible Transportation Systems, a member of the Control the Loop coalition, has set a meeting for 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Waterloo Road Baptist Church, 3100 E. Waterloo Rd. in north Edmond.

For more information, contact Jerry Sochor, 340-4962.

Organizers of the Choctaw Outer Loop Awareness Group, which includes residents of Choctaw, Little Axe, Harrah, Newalla and Jones, have scheduled a meeting for 6:30 p.m. Wednesday in the seminar center of Eastern Oklahoma County Vo-Tech, 4601 N. Choctaw Rd. in Choctaw.

For more information, contact Carolyn Scatena, 391-3722.



A FINE EXAMPLE OF KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE

Council action supported Norman 2020 Plan

Editor, The Transcript:

The editorial published last Friday, Jan. 15, under Our View stated that the City Council "caved in to pressure and abandoned the 2020 plan." This is not correct.

The council did not abandon the 2020 Plan. They passed an amended resolution which states, in Paragraph 4, that in February 1997 they reviewed and adopted the Norman 2020 Plan and, in Paragraph 9 & 10, they choose a "no build" stance on any of the state's proposed routes because we already have a plan.

The amended resolution passed last week did not in any way alter or remove the Norman 2020 Plan.

It merely took a stance on anything different now being proposed by the state and imposed on our existing plan.

There are statutory procedures which the council must observe before the 2020 Plan can be altered or abandoned. These include public notification in advance of alteration and a period for public com-

ment prior to a vote.

I object strongly to the implication that the resolution characterizes Norman as "hardheaded, obstructionist and impossible to satisfy."

The council resolution was not "obstructionist," but demonstrated their responsibility and due diligence in the stewardship of taxpayer money and taxpayer concerns.

Non-roadway solutions — which rate higher than highway building in the Outer Loop MIS Preliminary Evaluation — should be, at the very least, tested prior to beginning any new construction.

The council proved that it was impossible to manipulate, Not impossible to satisfy.

The 7-to-2 vote in support of the amended resolution was a thoughtful and courageous vote.

The council should be praised for standing by the Norman 2020 Plan and rejecting flawed proposals from the state that were based on incomplete and inaccurate information.

And, concerning the letter recent-

ly mailed by the board of directors of the Norman Chamber of Commerce.

As a chamber member, I can state that we did not, as a group, vote on their official position statement, nor do I believe that chamber members universally agree with the opinion set forth by the board.

When the board of the Chamber of Commerce speaks, it is believed to represent the will of its membership.

There are many chamber members who are completely opposed to the chamber position on this issue and their opposition should be made known.

I invite other chamber members who object to the Chamber of Commerce letter in support of routes X, Y, Z and Zz to contact the chamber and demand accountability for their position, and then make your personal opinion known on this editorial page.

PAM McINTOSH
Norman

Indians drawn into outer loop fray

■ More than 650 hear of sacred burial grounds near proposed routes

Edmond
Sun,
1-27-99,
front
page

By JAMES COBURN
Sun Staff Writer

Concerned citizens joined in common cause Tuesday evening to "dead-end" a possible highway that would destroy their property.

More than 500 people, including representatives from the American Indian community, politely rallied at Waterloo Road Baptist Church Tuesday night, protesting the possible corridor. That group is claiming federal laws have been violated by not including the tribes in the study process.

The purpose of the meeting, which lasted more than three hours, was not to tell horror stories but to target a solution, Edmond resident Jerry Sochor told the audience.

The curious listened to issues presented by speakers concerning environmental aspects, issues of imminent domain, and simple-yet-profound rights of citizens, who in voicing their opinions can alter decisions regarding the corridor study.

A \$375,000 outer loop study is being

sponsored by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

The study has caused alarm for northeast Edmond residents living in the path of five alternate routes being considered to relieve traffic congestion. All alternatives terminate at Waterloo Road and Interstate 35.

Before the session, Cynthia Russell was one of dozens of persons whose eyes fixated on a map detailing the five alternative highway studies.

"Generally, if you're going to have an area to be zoned for business, the people affected are notified and that wasn't done," said the owner of property four miles east of I-35 and Waterloo Road.

Residents wrote complaints on response sheets Tuesday night, which were delivered this morning to the Department of Transportation and Cobb Engineering, the

See **OUTER LOOP**, Page 5A



JAMES COBURN/The Edmond Sun

Hundreds of concerned residents press to get a look at a map detailing the five alternative routes for an outer loop that could possibly pass through northeast Edmond. Mike Russell points to an area that threatens his mother's home. At right, Cynthia Westermier tries to see how the highway may affect her Waterloo Road property.

OUTER LOOP: Officials seeking input

■ From Page 1A

firm designing the highway.

Transportation officials are seeking input from the community about the outer loop plans. A major financial investment study is first needed to complete the project, which could be constructed in 2020. However, transportation officials have said federal and state funding isn't in place, and the project may not happen.

Today, opponents of the highway have found the American Indian community has joined their protests.

The crowd listened quietly as Maurice Eban and Mervin Wright Jr., who represent the National Congress of American Indians, explained how the construction of the highway is a violation of federal law.

An outer loop corridor would destroy sacred burial ground, said Eban.

The Nevada residents were invited by the Wapapah and Kickapoo American Indian tribes. And they accused the federal government along with Oklahoma transportation officials of violating the law by not notifying the Wapapah and Kickapoo tribes of the ongoing study.

A repatriation act became federal law signed by former President George Bush in 1990, he said. That law allows tribes to work with archeologists and museums to ensure ancestral remains will be respected, said Eban.

He told *The Sun* after the meeting that the ancestral graves are within the outer loop routes near Norman. Eban said these sites are protected by federal law. And the secret location of where the burial ground rests is also protected by law, he said.

Eban assailed government officials for placing a map of the "sacred" burial grounds on the Internet, which is illegal. State archeologists have since pulled the map from public access.

"The children that are buried there, they are our ancestors now and are respected in that manner," said Eban.

Oklahoma City attorney Robin Stead, who spoke on the issue of imminent domain, agreed that laws may have been broken. Imminent domain is taking private land for public good.

Norman resident Michelle Moore told the audience that 11 other archaeological sites would be sacrificed under one of the route options.

Moore is coordinating communications among the opposing outer loop factions. The Control the Loop Action Coalition has become the umbrella group, she said.

Transportation officials have said the outer loop is needed to attract business to Oklahoma, but Moore said taxes to build the road and toll fees will deter economic development.

Also, she is among the many who criticize transportation officials for poor communication concerning the proposed highway.

"You ask these guys (transportation officials) a question — you want a simple yes or no answer and they talk you around the south 40 for 20 minutes," she said.

Transportation officials will be invited to a future meeting, where residents' concerns can be addressed one-on-one, said Sochor, who is the Edmond-area coordinator of an informal group protesting the outer loop. His property lies near Waterloo Road and the interstate where all five proposed routes end.

Many opponents want the state to consider non-highway options, such as light rail or vehicle lanes dedicated to cars with more than one occupant.

"The non-roadway options should be tried first before a new dime is spent on concrete," Moore said.

Norman resident Mike Opitz spoke to the crowd and also endorsed the non-highway alternatives. He has served on the outer loop advisory committee while representing the Sierra Club. The club is a national organization monitoring lobbying for environmental protection.

Opitz fears polluted water

draining from the highway would drastically harm the quality of water for area residents. He said traffic congestion can be remedied without building the loop by using the non-highway options.

Dave Moore, the leader of the Control the Loop Coalition of Norman, concurred with the majority of views expressed.

"Not only have they (transportation officials) carelessly, incompetently and arrogantly engaged in a process that has the potential to deeply hurt thousands of people, and deeply scar the beautiful land of central Oklahoma, but they have not even attempted to notify the people whose homes, traditions hopes and dreams will be destroyed," he said.

(James Coburn can be reached via email at [jacoburn@edmond-sun.com](mailto:jcoburn@edmond-sun.com))

Edmond
Sun,
1-27-99,
page 5A

Tribes Protest Metro Loop Proposal

By Christy Watson
Staff Writer

Daily Oklahoman, 1-27-89, page 1

The largest national organization representing Native Americans is demanding Oklahoma City-area Indian tribes be included in a multi-agency study of a proposed new interstate highway surrounding the metro area.

Two members of the National Congress of American Indians spoke out about the proposed

outer loop at a community meeting in Edmond Tuesday night. Organizers estimated at least 650 people from metro area communities, many angry about the proposed highway, attended the meeting at Waterloo Road Baptist Church.

Mervin Wright Jr., a member of the national Indian group, said tribal family cemeteries east and north of Lake Thunderbird are in the path of at least

one proposed corridor. That means leaders of metro area tribes should be among those deciding whether the highway should be built, he said. "Whenever our backs are to the wall, we have to come out swinging," Wright said.

At issue is a \$375,000 study by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the Oklahoma Turn-

pike Authority on whether an interstate highway is needed to relieve traffic congestion from existing highways. The study, which includes five proposed corridors for a highway and an option not to build the road, has caused heated debate in several metro communities in the path of the proposed routes.

Tuesday's meeting focused largely on reasons why the so-

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Loop

From Page 1

called outer loop highway shouldn't be built and whether it's needed.

But the Indian group's opposition could constitute a legal threat. Wright said he feared federal laws may have been violated by failing to include tribal leaders on the committee studying potential highway routes. He also questioned the publication of protected archaeological sites on the Internet.

"It could be legally argued that because federal funds are being used for the study that the transportation department had to involve the tribes," Wright said.

David Streb, a state Transportation Department planning engineer, confirmed federal money allocated to the transportation department and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments is helping fund the study.

However, Streb said the department hasn't broken any federal laws requiring notification of tribes.

If officials decide to build the road, an environmental impact study would be required, Streb said. Such a study would identify archaeological sites and federally protected tribal land.

That type of study, which would require notification of Indian tribes, isn't conducted until about five years before a new road is built, Streb said.

If transportation officials decide an outer loop highway is needed, they say it likely won't be built until 2020 because no funding is available.

Streb said encouraged the involvement of local tribes, including the Kickapoo, Absent Shawnee and Sac & Fox Nation. Another community meeting to discuss the outer loop proposal is planned at 6:30 p.m. today at the Eastern Oklahoma County Vo-Tech, 4601 N Choctaw Road, in Choctaw.

Kickapoos Fear Proposed Highway Will Threaten Burial Land

By Christy Watson
Staff Writer

Indian burial and ceremonial sites in eastern Oklahoma County could be destroyed by a highway proposal aimed at easing metro area traffic congestion, Kickapoo tribal officials fear.

"We have many families that have lived there on tribal land for generations," said George Bearclaw, Kickapoo Tribe executive director.

"A lot of cultural religious grounds that we have are there,

and what they call Indian homes. There's also some family burial grounds that have been there since the Kickapoo Tribe has been in Oklahoma."

Bearclaw said many families live east of Jones on land allotted to the tribe by the federal government in the last century.

Tribal officials and two members of the National Congress of American Indians met with state transportation officials Wednesday to discuss a multiagency study of an outer loop highway.

Kickapoo leaders, along with members of the Sac & Fox Nation and the Absentee Shawnee Tribe, said they weren't notified of the \$375,000 study being conducted on the highway's route, which could affect federally protected tribal lands.

However, at least some Indian officials will serve on an advisory committee studying proposed highway routes.

"There was a lot of sharing of information," said David Streb, a state Transportation Department

planning engineer. "I think they have a much better perspective of what's happening."

The two members of the National Congress of American Indians, the largest national organization representing Indians, spoke at a community meeting in Edmond on Tuesday and Choctaw on Wednesday. More than 600 people attended each meeting.

Mervin Wright Jr. said he wants to ensure compliance with laws that protect tribal lands.

Bearclaw said many Kickapoos

have family cemeteries in the path of at least two of the proposed routes. Indians are forbidden by tradition and culture to move their buried loved ones, he said.

The purpose of the highway study by the transportation department, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the

Oklahoma Turnpike Authority is to decide whether an interstate highway is needed to relieve traffic congestion from existing highways. The study, which includes five proposed corridors for a highway and an option not to build the road, has caused debate in several metro cities.

Outer Loop Shunned by Landowners

By Christy Watson
Staff Writer

Eighteen-wheel trucks could someday roll around urban parts of Norman and through more rural parts of eastern and northern Oklahoma County on a new interstate highway.

That same road also could carry thousands of metro area travelers wanting to avoid the congestion of rush hour traffic on Interstate 235 through downtown and Broadway Extension.

At least that's what Sam Shehab envisions.

Shehab is an engineer with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation and is overseeing a study on if and where a highway surrounding the metro area will be built.

The \$375,000 study has caused concern among many residents in Edmond, Norman, Choctaw, south Oklahoma City and Arcadia. In December, transportation officials unveiled five conceptual corridors for the highway. Each of the corridors, selected by a 70-member advisory committee of state, local and civic officials, is two miles wide.

Although transportation officials want the proposed highway to divert traffic off of heavily traveled I-35 and I-235 through downtown, commuters likely won't be the only ones on the road.

That belief confirms the worst fear of some eastern Oklahoma County homeowners who suffer from what David Moore calls "nimby" — not in my backyard.

The Norman resident is opposed to the loop proposals and helped organize the Control the Loop Action Coalition.

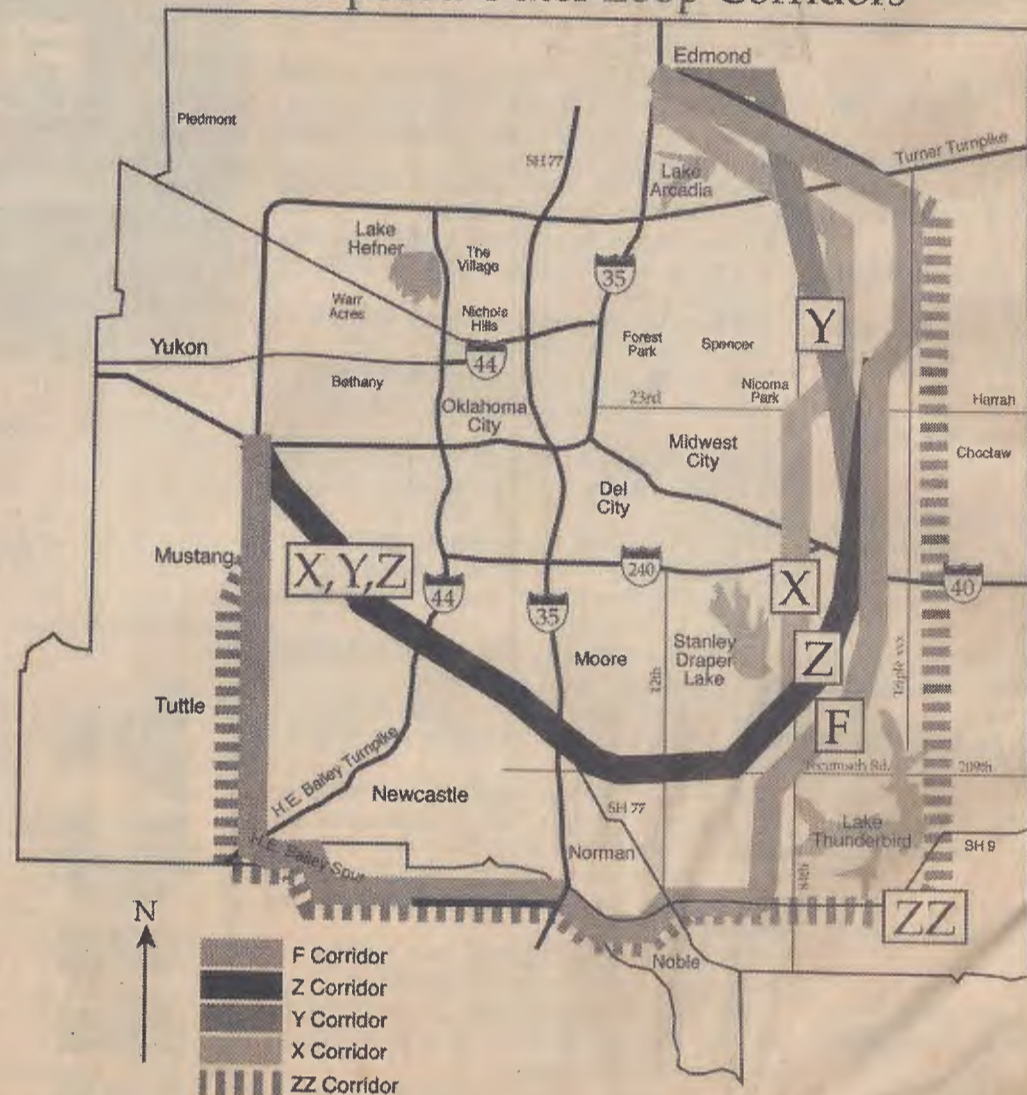
In January, the group held a meeting in Norman and assisted with meetings in Edmond and Choctaw.

"I believe the outer loop gang has just been flat out trying to deceive us," Moore said at the Jan. 26 meeting in Edmond.

More than 600 people attended, and the Sierra Club also announced its opposition to the highway proposal.

The club joined the Norman City Council and the Kickapoo Tribe, which also have passed resolutions opposing the project.

Proposed Outer Loop Corridors



continued on next page

Daily Oklahoman/The Norman Oklahoman
2-1-99, continued

Highway Heartache

Transportation officials have repeatedly said the outer loop study is not about I-35 becoming a trade corridor for the North American Free Trade Agreement. But Shehab said it's only logical that increased truck traffic entering Oklahoma from Texas on I-35 would travel on the proposed highway.

The outer loop likely would begin at I-35 south of the metro and end at I-35 north of Edmond. However, Shehab said attempts to divert freight traffic should begin south of Norman and connect with the eastern portion of the proposed outer loop.

Shehab admits his belief about freight traffic diversion is theoretical. It assumes an outer loop highway or another highway bypassing I-35 will be built. His theory also assumes money will be available for a new road.

"I think the public is being a lot more optimistic about funding than we are," said Terri Angier, state Transportation Department spokeswoman.

Angier and other highway officials agree funding for right of way acquisition probably won't be available for at least 10 years.

"It was not ever our intention to make construction immediate," said Zach Taylor, executive director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

In a recent interview with *The Oklahoman*, Shehab was adamant that even if people don't want a new highway, the road's necessity is readily apparent.

"We better plan for it now, or God help us," he said.

In 1990, transportation officials estimated metro area residents traveled about 19.1 million miles. By 2020, that number is expected to jump to 28.6 million miles, according to figures from the Association of Central Oklahoma Gov-

ernments. However, that figure does not include the anticipated increase in freight traffic.

While many have questioned the need for a new highway, there's little doubt that traffic on I-35 is increasing. In 1996, about 93,000 vehicles traveled I-35 between SE 15 and Reno daily. In 1997, that number jumped to 95,400, according to the state Transportation Department.

As many as 69,700 traveled daily on I-235 near the state Capitol in 1996. That increased to 79,000 in 1997.

A similar growth pattern of I-35 traffic continues through downtown Oklahoma City and Edmond. Figures for 1998 aren't yet available, but transportation officials have said the widening of I-35 from SE 15 to Shields Boulevard in Moore, expected to be complete in 2004, will further increase traffic.

Shehab said building a new road isn't a matter of convenience for truck drivers. Instead, it's a safety issue for drivers.

"It's erroneous to call it a truck bypass because you don't know who uses it," he said. "More cars than trucks use the roads anyway."

But David Moore of the Control the Loop Action Coalition told homeowners the trucks' freight likely would include hazardous and toxic chemicals and military shipments.

Money Matters

Fear of a federally designated trade corridor also leaves many residents wondering if federal money can be used to build a new highway.

The answer, according to transportation officials? Yes and no.

Yes because \$700 million is available over the next five years as part of the federal highway administration's "borders and corridors" program. Corridors of national significance, economic growth and international or interregional trade are eligible for money.

If a proposed highway, like the outer loop, is designated as a trade route, it would qualify.

However, Oklahoma's transportation officials

already have requested part of the \$700 million — distributed in \$140 million segments over the next five years — to widen I-35 from the South Canadian River north through Norman to Shields Boulevard and to reconstruct and widen the highway's interchange with I-240.

Improving I-35 — not completing a loop around the metro — is the transportation department's priority, Shehab said.

"The money available will hardly be enough to help us six-lane I-35," said Taylor of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments.

Despite the recent outpouring of opposition, highway officials are excited about the input.

The study has generated at least 1,000 written comments, 67 E-mails and more than 300 phone calls, Taylor said.

And Angier hopes the comments keep coming.

"We want to hear from everybody — positive and negative," she said.

She also said transportation department officials will make themselves available for metro area communities that want to have town meetings to discuss the loop study.

"It's important for the public to educate themselves so they make educated comments."

Loop Proposals Leave Property Owners Guessing

Daily Oklahoman, 2-4-99, p. 9

By Melissa Nelson
Staff Writer

Smoothing a bumpy road of discontent over proposals for an interstate highway loop around Oklahoma City won't be easy, transportation officials said Wednesday.

Maps of suggested routes for the roadway served to incense, not inform, area residents, said David Streb, planning engineer for the state Transportation Department.

"We put five, two-mile wide bands on a map that encompass thousands and thousands of property owners," Streb said. "That might not have been the best way to do this."

The comments were made in a meeting of an advisory committee formed to recommend a route for the interstate that would form a wide loop around the metro area. Traffic planners have said the loop, which wouldn't be built for at least 10 years, will be needed to alleviate predicted traffic congestion in the growing area.

Wednesday's advisory committee meeting was the first since a series of tense public meetings in areas including Edmond, Norman and Choctaw.

Streb said opposition to the five proposed routes has led the department to hold more meetings and to involve more citizen groups in the process.

Transportation officials also pushed back an April deadline for picking a route, he said.

"We hope to get rid of misinformation and misperceptions about this project," he said.

But the concessions didn't quell some residents' concerns, including Karen Wakelee of Choctaw.

Wakelee said each of the five proposed routes pass over property her family has owned for seven generations.

"The fact that this thing may be 20 years away doesn't matter to me, because I intend to die in my house," Wakelee said.

Jerry Sochor, a northeast Edmond resident, said the proposed routes have left property owners in his area in financial limbo.

"We are talking about 650 to 1,000 homeowners who don't know if they will be able to sell their homes," he said. "Their properties have essentially been seized until a decision is made."

Many metro area residents are pushing planners to abandon plans for a new road. Instead they say expanded bus services or a commuter rail system could solve future traffic congestion.

Traffic officials said Wednesday they will study these alternatives before deciding to build the road.

The road will only be built if a study of other options concludes they would not meet the traffic needs of the metro area expected to grow by 22 percent before 2020, said consulting engineer Marc Long.

Choctaw/Nicomma Park
Free Press

2-4-99, Front Page

► OUTER LOOP

'We want you to know our hearts'

■ *Crowd at city hall voices opposition to Outer Loop*

By JEFF SHULTZ
STATE EDITOR

More than 100 people opposing the anticipated Outer Loop highway system showed up Tuesday night at the Choctaw City Council meeting hoping to make their point about how they feel about the loop.

They wanted a chance to have their opinions heard and to present to the Council a resolution that calls for the city to support the "no build" alternative, as outlined in the Major Investment Study, and they wanted the council to vote on the resolution as new business.

They got their chance, but it wasn't exactly what they were expecting.

"Their resolution, as we saw it, did not qualify as

new business as defined by the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act. Therefore, it was decided tonight's meeting was not a proper forum to address their concerns," City Manager Robert Floyd said.

At the beginning of the meeting Choctaw Mayor Ruth Luke announced the crowd would have a chance to present their resolution to the council after the meeting was adjourned.

"This is not a public hearing," Luke told the packed council chamber. "If you have any hand outs or resolutions to give to us we would like to take those after the meeting."

Another item dealing with the Outer Loop was already on the council's agenda. The item was for the

See LOOP page 14

► COUNCIL

Request for loop hearing made

By JEFF SHULTZ
STATE EDITOR

Choctaw City Council members adopted a resolution Tuesday night officially requesting the Major Investment Study group to hold a public hearing in Choctaw as part of the study's public hearing schedule on the proposed Outer Loop highway system.

"I have asked the (MIS) Steering Committee twice to hold a public hearing on the loop in Choctaw and so far they have given no indication they are going to do it," said City Manager Robert Floyd, a member of the MIS Advisory Committee.

Floyd said the study group - made up of members from the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Turnpike Authority and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments - has four more public hearings planned on the loop.

"Our area is one of the regions that is going to be most affected by the loop and it's important that we have a public hearing in Choctaw to address people's concerns," Floyd told *The Free Press*.

The council's adoption of the resolution came before a packed council

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► COUNTY

Loop

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

approval of a resolution calling on the MIS study group to hold a public hearing on the loop either at the EastOC Vo-Tech or the Boren Activity Center located at Choctaw High School.

"We understand these people's desire to let their views be expressed and that's why we, as a council, are trying to get a public hearing scheduled for this area," Luke told *The Free Press*. "Based on the expertise of our city manager and city attorney, it was determined that this was not an item for new business. We want to hear their concerns and we want to do that in a facility that is large enough to house the number of people that want to speak."

Luke said she and the other council members did not want to vote on the group's alternate resolution without first studying it.

Despite her attempts to appease the crowd, some members of the group confronted Luke and other council members after the meeting.

"We were told we could approach the council on this issue and that's why we came here tonight. We just want to be heard. We want you to know our hearts," one person passionately pleaded.

The group's alternate resolution was given to the council by Choctaw resident Stephanie Urquhart, who told the council she delivered the resolutions to City Hall by noon on Monday.

The "no build" option mentioned in the resolution is one that mandates the state build no new highways, except those that already have been programmed. Under that scenario no Eastern Loop connecting the Turner Turnpike to I-40 through EastOC would be built. The resolution also calls for a "no roadway" option, meaning the state should seek other solutions to anticipated traffic congestion other than building a new highway.

"Why was this not considered new business?" Urquhart asked. "I delivered these resolutions prior to the 24 hour posting of the council's agenda, which would qualify it for new business."

City Attorney Ted Pool told the group that he had advised Floyd the alternate resolution was a subject that did not qualify as new business.

"Whether that was right or wrong can be debated for hours. But in good faith we made this decision in an effort to comply with the law," Pool said.

Pool told the crowd there were various procedures they could go

through to get their alternate resolution on the next council agenda in two weeks, at which point one resident in the crowd requested Ward 6 Councilman Dale Gill to have the item on the next agenda.

Gill responded that he would consider the request.

Some members of the crowd were upset the council had adopted a resolution last fall favoring two of the proposed corridor routes on the MIS plan and asked the council members how they could do that when the majority of residents opposed the plan.

"At that time we were unaware of any opposition to the loop," said Ward 3 Councilwoman Jeannie Abts. "I'm sure if we had known that, our vote might have been different at that time. I can assure you that I will vote on any future measures concerning this issue the way my constituents want me to vote, but you have to let me know what your feelings are."

Floyd told the group there had been several stories on the loop appearing in *The Free Press* and other newspapers for several months prior to the October meet-

Last week a meeting on the loop was held at the EastOC Vo-Tech where more than 800 people heard speakers who oppose the loop project. The meeting was sponsored by a Norman group called "Control The Outer Loop Coalition."

"We understand these people's desire to let their views be expressed and that's why we, as a council, are trying to get a public hearing scheduled for this area," Choctaw Mayor Ruth Luke told *The Free Press*. "We want to hear their concerns and we want to do that in a facility that is large enough to house the number of people that want to speak."

ing when the council adopted the resolution favoring the two routes.

"This topic has been discussed for a long time and up until the last few weeks we have not heard any opposition to the proposed loop," he noted.

Floyd, who is a member of the MIS Advisory Committee, said if the council passes the alternate resolution presented by Urquhart or expresses opposition to the loop in other ways, he would pass those sentiments along to the Advisory Committee.

Choctaw/Nicomma Park
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Council

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

chamber room as more than 100 people showed up for the meeting to voice their opposition to the loop.

The resolution calls for the public hearing to be held either at the EastOC Vo-Tech or the Boren Activities Center at Choctaw High School. The Boren Center was chosen as an alternative spot for the hearing in light of the public's response to other meetings on the subject.

PRESS RELEASE FROM ZACH TAYLOR, 02/13/99

"The people of Central Oklahoma have spoken, and we have listened," said Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Neil McCaleb, as he announced **indefinite discontinuation** of consideration of the eastern portion of the Outer Loop.

Responding to significant public involvement in the long-range study, state and area transportation planners have decided to discontinue review of the eastern portion of the Loop.

"This was a study to see if the Loop was needed or wanted," said Association of Central Oklahoma Governments chairman Steve Knox. "We're not sure whether it is needed, but evidently it is not wanted," he added.

Planners will continue to consider intermodal options, transit, improved signalization, express busses, carpooling, high occupancy vehicle lanes and so forth to mitigate long-term traffic concerns as well as recommendations regarding the southwest portion of the proposed Loop.

This involves study of a possible corridor from I-40 near the airport angling south and east I-35 in the Norman area.

Partners in the this study -- the Oklahoma Department of Transportation, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority -- have agreed to focus current efforts on the southwest portion of the loop and intermodal alternatives **until more complete information is available** regarding future trade traffic, commercial traffic generated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The Outer Loop Study was initiated by cities, towns and counties of central Oklahoma in conjunction with state transportation agencies in an effort to look at long-range transportation needs and how they relate to future zoning and land use decisions.

Norman Transcript, Sunday, 2-14-99, Front Page

Outer Loop study dropped

► ACOG says they will indefinitely suspend consideration of east loop

Staff and Wire Reports

A study to determine the need for a proposed interstate highway around the Oklahoma City metropolitan area has been dropped because strong opposition, officials announced Saturday.

"The people of central Oklahoma have spoken and we have listened," Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Neal McCaleb said in a statement.

McCaleb joined officials with the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments in the decision to indefinitely suspend consideration of an east loop around the Oklahoma City area.

Much of the outer loop already exists or is

under construction in the northwest and southwest fringes of Oklahoma City, but no route has been established or funded on the east side, stretching from Norman to Edmond.

The \$375,000 study was intended to determine the future route of an outer loop around Oklahoma City and study other ways of reducing interstate congestion that is projected over the next 20 years.

Objections reached a crescendo recently as vocal crowds gathered at public hearings in Norman, Choctaw and Edmond.

Transportation officials were stunned last month after the Norman City Council passed a resolution urging the state not to build any interstate loop system through its city limits.

Dave Moore, founder of Control the Loop Action Coalition, was cautious about Saturday's announcement.

"It sounds like we may have won a small vic-

tory," he said, "but NAFTA has not gone away ...

Moore is still concerned with possible construction of an I-35 bypass for truck traffic created by the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Moore's group has opposed all eastern loop route alternatives as well as the possible bypass extending from Wayne to Guthrie.

The ACOG statement released Saturday states, "Partners in the study (ODOT, ACOG and the OTA) have agreed to focus current efforts on the southwest portion of the loop and intermodal alternatives until more complete information is available regarding future trade traffic, commercial traffic generated by the North American Free Trade Agreement."

Intermodal options include transit, improved signalization, express buses, carpooling and high occupancy vehicle lanes to mitigate long-term traffic concerns.

Public Outcry Puts Brakes On East Loop

Sunday Oklahoman, 2-14-99, Front page

By Chip Minty
and Amy David
Staff Writers

Rampant misinformation and strong opposition have forced state highway planners to abandon the study of an interstate loop around the eastern fringes of Oklahoma City, officials said Saturday.

“The people of central Oklahoma have spoken and we have listened,” Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Neal McCaleb said in a statement released to *The Oklahoman* on Saturday.

McCaleb heads the state Transportation Department and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

He joined officials with the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments in the decision to indefinitely suspend consideration of an east loop around the Oklahoma City area.

“Responding to significant public involvement in the long-range study, state and area transportation planners have decided to discontinue review of the eastern portion of the loop,” agency

officials said in their joint statement.

“This was a study to see if the loop was needed or wanted,” Association of Central Oklahoma Governments Chairman Steve Knox said. “We’re not sure whether it is needed, but evidently it is not wanted.”

The \$375,000 study was intended to determine the future route of an outer loop around Oklahoma City and study other ways of reducing interstate congestion that is projected over the next 20 years.

Much of the outer loop already exists or is under construction in the northwest and southwest fringes of Oklahoma City, but no route has been established or funded on the east side, stretching from Norman to Edmond.

The east-side routes encountered growing opposition since the study’s first public hearings last spring.

Objections reached a crescendo recently as raucous crowds gathered at public hearings in Norman, Choctaw and Edmond.

See LOOP, Page 21-A

From Page 1-A

Transportation officials were stunned last month after the Norman City Council passed a resolution urging the state not to build any interstate loop system through its city limits.

"If we don't have the support of the people who initially came to us, who are we doing this for?" said Terri Angier, spokeswoman for the transportation department.

She said the state initiated the study after communities approached the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments asking for solutions to traffic congestion.

The association asked the transportation department to help by contributing technical expertise and sharing in the study's cost.

"This wasn't an issue generated by ODOT. We do agree there is going to be a congestion problem at this rate in about 20 years," Angier said.

The current expansion of Interstate 35 to six lanes won't handle the traffic between Norman and Oklahoma City in 20 years if it doubles as expected to 180,000 vehicles per day, she said.

Angier said anxiety caused by the study was exactly what the agencies were trying to avoid by involving the public in long-range planning.

"All we are trying to do is preplan so communities could deal with zoning compliance in advance, and building permits wouldn't be issued for housing that will eventually have to be torn down."

Angier said mistakes were made in the way the study was presented to the pub-

lic.

"Bad information got out and got rampant among the community. People became untrusting of the state to provide the correct information."

"If we had more information to hand out ... and if people had taken more responsibility to better inform themselves, I don't think we would be here today," she said.

Dave Moore, founder of Control the Loop Action Coalition, was cautious about Saturday's announcement.

"It sounds like we may have won a battle," he said.

However, Moore is still concerned with possible construction of an I-35 bypass for truck traffic created by the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico.

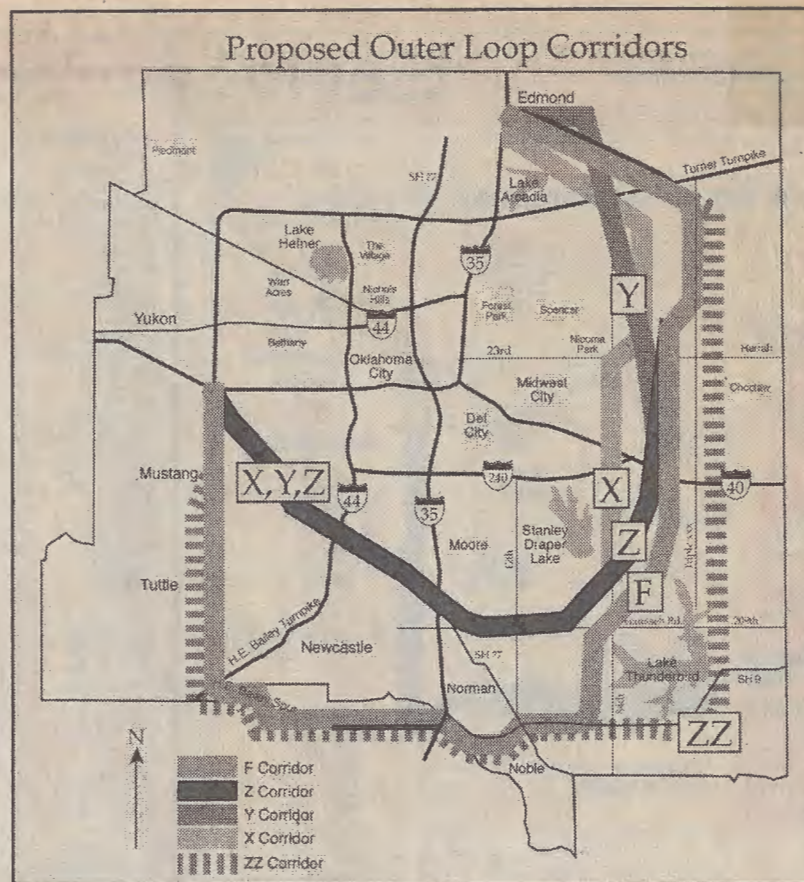
Moore's group has opposed all eastern loop route alternatives as well as the possible bypass extending from Wayne to Guthrie.

"If the Oklahoma City loop is taken out of the picture, there's still the NAFTA bypass and that's a whole 'nother ball game," said Moore, a Norman resident.

But Moore said he is gratified by the victory.

"We've been told all along to just give up and quit. ... You can't fight city hall," Moore said. "I think it demonstrates that people can make a difference if they're just willing to expend some effort."

Zach Taylor, director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments, said the east loop study may have been a moot



A map shows proposed corridors for an outer loop around east Oklahoma City. State planners have abandoned a study that includes proposed routes X, Y, Z, F and ZZ east of Interstate 35. Those routes were considered potential loops that would carry traffic east of I-35 north to Edmond.

"We've been told all along to just give up and quit. ... You can't fight city hall. I think it demonstrates that people can make a difference if they're just willing to expend some effort."

— Dave Moore, founder, Control the Loop Action Coalition

point anyway.

"I think that there has always been a question of the necessity of the east loop."

It's likely the city area will not need an east loop or a NAFTA bypass within the next 10 to 20 years, especially after I-35 is widened to six lanes past Norman, Taylor said.

Projections Taylor has seen show I-35 will be finished in 10 years, but he hopes the state can speed that work with federal

money Congress recently allocated for transportation.

Along with increasing the capacity of I-35, Taylor said state planners will continue to look for other ways of reducing congestion such as improved signalization, express buses, carpooling and high occupancy lanes.

While the east loop study has been abandoned, planners will complete their study of a proposed southwest portion of the loop, Taylor said.

That would involve a possible corridor from Interstate 40, angling around Oklahoma City's southwest side toward I-35 in the Norman area.

Angier said the transportation department is being encouraged by the federal government to do more long-range planning.

With long-range planning being a new concept for the nation and Oklahoma, the transportation department understands the public's anxiety, she said.

Angier said there would be more long-range plans. "We would like for people to take advantage of them and use the study for their own planning and living conditions instead of shooting them down."

Interstate Study Decision Throws Supporters for Loop

By Christy Watson
and David Hartman
Staff Writers

Bill Hoag thinks he'll be dead by the time an interstate is built near his hometown of Jones.

The mayor of the small eastern Oklahoma County town is disappointed that state highway officials discontinued a study on building a highway east of Interstate 35.

"The losers in this are going to be the grandkids, because they won't have that to drive on," Hoag said Monday. "They just set the clock back 30 years by discontinuing it."

Hoag isn't the only one perplexed by the decision of the Association of Central Oklahoma Gov-

ernments, the state Transportation Department and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority. The three agencies funded the \$375,000 study to decide if and where an interstate loop around the Oklahoma City metro area were needed.

Choctaw City Manager Robert Floyd said of the decision announced Saturday, "I was surprised, but that's fine. We'll concentrate on our road improvements out here."

Jones and Choctaw city leaders have been vocal in their support of the study.

But highway officials said the opposition of many metro area residents is why the eastern loop portion of the study was abandoned.

"The losers in this are going to be the grandkids, because they won't have that to drive on. They just set the clock back 30 years by discontinuing it."

— Jones Mayor Bill Hoag

They will continue to study the southwest portion of the loop to determine a possible alignment.

The routes begin near SW 15 and Sara Road and then either travel through south Oklahoma City to I-

"Something doesn't smell right. If you've ever fought the state before, you know that it doesn't come this easy."

— Jerry Sochor, coordinator,
Concerned Oklahomans
for Responsible Transportation
Systems

35 or south through Mustang to the H.E. Bailey Turnpike, following State Highway 9 to I-35.

Transportation officials have said they have no money to build a new interstate, nor have they de-

cided if the road would be a turnpike.

The study also will review expanded bus service, commuter rail service, carpooling and high occupancy vehicle lanes throughout the metro area, highway officials said.

Residents who attended meetings in December and January encouraged highway planners to consider commuter rail service as an alternative to building a new road.

Norman officials voted to oppose plans for a new highway, while officials in Mustang and Oklahoma City have supported the plans.

Saturday's announcement hasn't satisfied many residents in Arcadia, Choctaw, Edmond and other

areas opposed to a new highway.

Residents in Arcadia planned to meet tonight to discuss strategy for opposing the outer loop before last week's announcement.

That meeting is still on for 7 p.m. at St. James A.M.E. Church because residents believe the latest development may be a stall tactic until after an election season.

"Something doesn't smell right," said Jerry Sochor, coordinator of Edmond's Concerned Oklahomans for Responsible Transportation Systems. *"If you've ever fought the state before, you know that it doesn't come this easy."*

Arcadia Mayor Marilyn Murrell said the focus of tonight's meeting

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Loop

From Page 1

probably will shift to sharing information about transportation alternatives.

"All along, the meeting was designed to share concepts about future travel in central Oklahoma," Murrell said. "And they (state agencies) never said they were going to stop planning."

The meeting will give Arcadia residents a chance to familiarize themselves with that planning process, Murrell said.

Sochor said he wonders if outer loop talks will be revived after Edmond's city council election.

Association of Central Oklahoma Governments Chairman Steve Knox also serves as Ward 2 representative on the Edmond City Council. Knox is up for re-election next month.

But Knox reiterated Monday that the issue is dead "unless everyone comes to us all holding hands and saying, 'We want this.'"

There is always opposition to road projects, Knox said, but usually there also is support.

"There didn't seem to be any support for this one," Knox said. "Without the political support of the communities through which the road goes, it's not going to happen."

Despite beliefs that the eastern loop road study might be revived, association Executive Director Zack Taylor said that won't happen in the foreseeable future.

Terri Angier, spokeswoman for the transportation department, said rumors that the eastern loop portion of the study continues to move forward are typical of the misinformation associated with the study.

"The mistrust was there so that we couldn't even get them to believe us when we tried to give them information."

Knox said most people didn't realize the proposed routes were drawn only for the purpose of the study

and weren't necessarily locations where the loop would be built.

Jones Mayor Hoag, who participated in similar loop efforts 30 years ago, said stopping the study is a bad idea.

"You can't make a rational decision until you see what the study brings out," he said.

Hoag said members of Norman's Control the Loop Action Coalition, which overwhelmingly opposed building a new highway, should want the study.

"They were looking at it because they didn't see any results saying it was needed. Now they'll have to wait another 30 years or until they resume the study to see any results."

Demos will oppose Keating's plan the next time around

By Carter Bradley
Transcript Capitol Bureau

Loop scoop

Transportation director Neal McCaleb assured Hobson, Sen. Trish Weedn and Rep. Doug Miller that construction will start soon as possible to convert about five miles of SH 9 into a four-lane freeway from I-35 to intersect with the turnpike to Lawton and Texas. It will also connect to the turnpike being built to bypass Oklahoma City on the west. That will be an extension of the Kilpatrick turnpike which ends at I-35 and the Turner pike to Tulsa.

Earlier, McCaleb sought to quell the tumultuous debate over a route for an interstate bypass which may someday slice through eastern suburbs of Norman and Oklahoma City. He announced the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments would suspend a study of the route inspired by federal matching money available because of the international trade agreement with Mexico.

McCaleb, in charge of both free and toll highways, explained the SH 9 project is not part of the billion dollar road program undertaken in 1997. Nations, who was not at the meeting, said the SH 9 project and toll road connection was a plan Norman civic leaders had supported when he was Norman's mayor.

Commenting on the bypass controversy, Rep. Wallace Collins said residents of his district had been misled by highway officials but will be pleased if McCaleb's clarification proves accurate. Maps showing proposed routes through his district were poorly drawn, Collins charged, "but clearly showed many homes and farms would be impacted."

"From the beginning," Collins added, "they were misled into believing they would have influence in what happens."

excerpt
from
long
article

Norman portion of loop blocked

Bill would cut references to road in master plan

By Mick Hinton
Capitol Bureau

Residents opposed to construction of the southeast portion of an Oklahoma City turnpike loop — which would take in the Norman area east of Interstate 35 — can rest a little easier after a bill passed its first hurdle Thursday in the state Legislature.

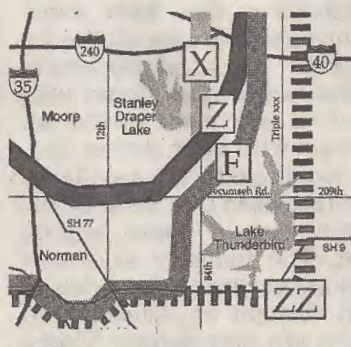
A measure excluding the Norman leg was approved by the House Transportation Committee and now goes to the full House.

House Bill 2574, calling for the exclusion, is being sponsored by Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, and Rep. Danny Hilliard, D-Sulphur. Both of the lawmakers' legislative districts include part of the area where the southeast portion of the loop would be built.

The bill would remove from the outer loop master plan any references to extending the loop

Outer loop opposition

A House panel has voted to cancel plans for a southeast leg of the proposed outer loop highway system. Here's a look at some of the previously proposed routes.



east of I-35 in the Moore and Norman area, then extending it north to Interstate 40 just east of Tinker Air Force Base. Collins said Republicans in the committee opposed taking the clause out of the overall plan, although no recorded vote was taken.

An original plan for the loop also called for extending the loop north to the Turner Turnpike.

Collins said people in his House district have been opposed to four or five different routes proposed.

"The people in Norman and Noble and the Norman City Council — everyone is opposed to it," he said. The Norman council passed a resolution urging that the southeast leg not be built.

By taking the references out of the master plan, Collins said there is further assurance that the southeast portion will not be completed.

He said many people who have bought acreages in east Norman are strongly opposed to the loop.

The state Transportation Department and Director Neal McCaleb have said there is not enough money to build that part of the loop anyway, but Collins said it is better to take the language out of the bill.

Public outcry from residents living in Norman and eastern Oklahoma County caused transportation officials to drop that portion of the study.

Staff writer Mick Hinton can be reached by e-mail at mhinton@oklahoman.com or by phone at 475-3105.

Norman Transcript, 3-7-99, p. A7

Misconceptions cloud community loop discussions

Editor, The Transcript:

The Sierra Club thanks the Norman City Council for its resolution of 1-12-99 opposing the construction of an OKC-area Outer Loop road. We've been participating in the loop issue since the beginning of the current loop study, the Major Investment Study (MIS). Several misconceptions are clouding our community's discussions on the loop; we're writing this letter to help clear them up.

First, the MIS does not capture the whole Outer Loop issue. The MIS is the latest of many Outer Loop studies performed over the past 30 years. The MIS is important because of its broad scope, its comprehensiveness and because under federal rules it requires public input. However, Oklahoma state law has authorized studies of the loop for decades — and possibly its construction as well — through the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority (OTA), an agency that plans and builds new roads as it sees fit with virtually no public input or oversight. The NAFTA Trade Corridor study adds more complexity, as it may recommend that an I-35 bypass be built around OKC. Such a bypass could be integrated with an Outer Loop, but it need not be. The bottom line: the recently announced "death" of the eastern half of the loop within the MIS does not guarantee that an east-side highway won't be built.

Second, the Norman City Council's resolution of 1-12-99 declares two related but separate preferences on the Outer Loop/NAFTA bypass issues: 1) any routing of an I-35 Trade Corridor Bypass should be located east of Lake Thunderbird, and 2) Norman supports the No-Build option. Notably, the City has taken no formal stance on whether a trade bypass should be built, only where it should go if built. Supporting the MIS's no-build option means opposing a loop road.

Third, building a loop is merely one of many ways to relieve future traffic congestion. There are many reasons to avoid building a loop; we explain them in detail in our loop position paper, available upon request from opitz@qns.com. The MIS examined several "non-road solutions" that relieve congestion without a loop, including better bus service, better train service (commuter rail for people, intermodal truck/rail combinations for freight), dedicated carpooling lanes and incentives to reduce the number of vehicles on existing roads during peak traffic periods (ride sharing, telecommuting, shifting work schedules, congestion pricing). In the MIS's preliminary analysis, 4 of the top 5 solutions and 7 of the top 11, were non-road solutions.

Fourth, supporting the MIS's "no-build" alternative by itself is an ineffective response to expected

future traffic congestion. No-build means we make no transportation system improvements beyond current commitments. The Sierra Club supports a better approach: "no-build plus the non-road options," allowing us to relieve congestion without a loop. We encourage the Norman City Council to support the non-road options explicitly, and to communicate their support to the highest levels of state government.

Finally, if our government agencies and politicians behave properly, Norman will not lose its influence over Outer Loop-related issues by opposing construction of a loop road. The Outer Loop MIS is headed by the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG). The City of Norman is an ACOG member in good standing and should not lose its membership privileges because of its stance on any public policy issue. When someone says otherwise, they really mean: "Gee, we're doing something unexpected. The people in power won't like us for it, and may even punish us." If this thinking is correct, we have a great example of broken government, and the people need to start fixing it immediately. Our government will behave only if we citizens insist that it behave.

Sierra Club, Red Earth Group
MIKE OPTIZ, RICHARD
MORRIS, MACK ROSE,
GLORIA LONG, RICK
HEDGEPATH, SALLY HARRIS

Chamber wants answers on loop route

Norman
Transcript
12-15-99, from page

By Randall Turk
Times of Business Editor

Norman Chamber of Commerce directors want to know why state planners apparently have ignored their input on proposals for interchanges through the city.

Meeting Monday, the chamber board voted to "solicit and get a response" to a June 25 letter from Mayor Don Thompson and cham-

TWO LOOPS!!

ber president Mike Pullin to members of the Outer Loop Study Committee. In the letter Thompson and Pullin objected to building a road through environmentally fragile east Norman.

They also recommended that a proposed I-35 bypass from the Purcell-Wayne area should be routed east of Lake Thunderbird instead of connecting to the outer loop in east Norman.

Loop: Chamber wants answers on highway plan

► Continued from Page A1

pike Spur, and then east along Highway 9 to I-35, where a highway would be built south of the Canadian River. The loop would then turn north through rural land between Lake Thunderbird and Norman, crossing the Turner Turnpike and connecting with I-35 north of Edmond.

In a public meeting held in Norman last week, ODOT engineer Terry McFall said state plans definitely call for connecting an I-35 bypass to the loop where it swings through east Norman.

In the joint letter to the Outer Loop Steering Committee after state planners held their first public meeting in Norman last June, Thompson and Pullin wrote that an outer loop across north Norman "makes sense." But the letter also stated that "the use of any part of Highway 9 within the Norman city limits for the outer loop and/or an Interstate 35 bypass would be disastrous for Norman."

The joint letter emphasized that the Norman 2020 growth plan "took considerable notice of the environmentally sensitive nature of the rural area around Lake Thunderbird." Below the lake area's thin soils is the

Garber-Wellington Aquifer, which supplies drinking water for Norman and much of the region.

At the Monday chamber meeting Don Wood, executive director of the Norman Economic Development Coalition, said "The farther out a loop is from Norman, the better off we are. This one's not far enough. It would be better to have the loop coming off I-35.... The only person to significantly influence this would be the governor." ???

Chamber Director Chuck Thompson, president of Republic Bank of Norman, said it's important that outer loop planners act on recommendations made by the chamber and the city. Thompson also suggested the chamber recommend an alternative route for the bypass, rather than merely object to the proposed route.

The Chamber Board approved Thompson's motion to ask members of the Outer Loop Steering Committee to respond to the joint letter sent to them in June.

"We need to get a response to the points made in the letter," Thompson said. "If they don't answer, we can approach the governor or take other action."

City officials say such a connection, traveled by as many as 30,000 heavy trucks per day, would be devastating to environmental

fragile land between the city and the lake. "I'm not sure why it made it," chamber

Transportation Committee chairman Alan Hendrick said of the proposed east side bypass plan. Hendrick said the metro loop and the I-35 bypass are "separate issues," but the bypass junction with the outer loop is

being considered to relieve congestion on I-35.

Two routes for the outer loop through Norman have been proposed by a study committee composed of two representatives each from the state Transportation Department, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments and the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority.

Under the current options, "corridor X, Y and Z" would begin where the Kirkpatrick Turnpike and I-40 connect, travel south and east along Norman's north side between Tecumseh and Franklin Roads, then head north at about 108th Ave. Northeast where they would separate and terminate at I-35 north of Edmond.

"Corridor F" would begin at the Kirkpatrick Turnpike, run south to the H.E. Bailey Turn-

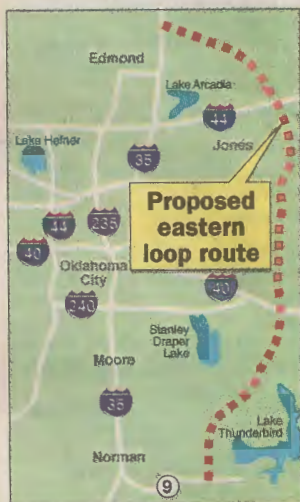
Committee resurrects highway loop plan

By Mick Hinton
Capitol Bureau

The state Senate Transportation Committee gave thumbs up Tuesday to keeping the eastern corridor in the Outer Loop Highway Master Plan for Oklahoma City, although city councils, particularly Norman, and hundreds of residents have opposed it.

Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, said Tuesday that city councils don't get to decide a transportation plan for the greater Oklahoma City area.

"Only the Legislature — not even Neal McCaleb — gets to do that," said Stipe, D-McAlester, because otherwise it would rarely be possible to build a highway involving mul-



tiple communities.

"But state Transportation Director McCaleb promised this wouldn't happen," said Dave Moore, a Norman-area

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Loop: Other solutions offered

From Page 1-A

citizen who represents more than 1,000 residents in the corridor area.

McCaleb was quoted in February 1999 as saying, "The (eastern) loop is dead."

David Streb, planning engineer with the state transportation department, said Tuesday that McCaleb's statement last year meant simply that the state was abandoning its study of an eastern corridor because residents and town officials had clearly spoken that they opposed it.

He said that McCaleb's comment did not mean that the corridor would never be built.

The purpose of adding the corridor would be to lessen traffic on Interstate 35, which is getting worse all the time, said Sen. Dave Herbert, D-Midwest City.

He said the area from south of Norman past Moore is particularly crowded during rush hours.

Herbert spearheaded the effort Tuesday to kill a bill that would have stripped the eastern corridor from the master plan outlined in state law.

He said it could well be another 20 years before any eastern leg is built. The measure was defeated 12-4.

Sen. Trish Weedn, D-Purcell, said that at least 800 people who heard McCaleb last spring "believe it was a dead issue," and it would be deceptive for the state to go back on a promise.

Weedn said the state Transportation Department mishandled information provided about the plan. The department's proposal outlined four possible routes, each cutting a two-mile-wide swath that would have taken the homes of 1,000 or more residents.

A battle about the eastern corridor has been looming for more than a year. Residents said they don't want an interstate-type highway running through their back yards.

Moore's daughter, Anna, who is 13, told the committee in a soft, timid voice to stick to

the promise made by McCaleb.

"You are going to die sooner than we are," she said, noting that she and her generation will have to foot the bill for the corridor.

The Sierra Club has joined the fracas. Spokesman Mike Opitz urged officials to consider alternatives, such as widening the lanes on I-35 and using rail, buses and designated lanes to alleviate I-35 traffic.

Herbert said building the corridor actually would solve air pollution problems because the worst kind occurs when cars are backed up and waiting along I-35. The western half of the loop is moving forward and will connect to the Kilpatrick Turnpike.

Other communities voicing concern over the past year have been Jones, Harrah, Choctaw and Edmond. The route would extend eastward from I-35 south of Norman, then follow a route roughly parallel to Indian Meridian, then cutting west to Interstate 35, north of the Turner Turnpike.

House Bill 2574* by Weedn and Rep. Wallace Collins, D-Norman, would have stopped the Oklahoma Turnpike Authority from ever building an eastern corridor toll road unless state law was amended. Stipe and others said that it stay in the statutes "only as a plan."

The state House of Representatives voted earlier this session to remove the eastern corridor from the plan.

Those voting to keep the eastern corridor in the master plan were senators Herbert; Stipe; Sam Helton, D-Lawton; J. Berry Harrison, D-Fairfax; Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher; Robert Kerr, D-Altus; Owen Laughlin, R-Woodward; Frank Shurden, D-Henryetta; Rick Littlefield, D-Grove; Jim Maddox, D-Lawton; Carol Martin, R-Duncan, and Scott Pruitt, R-Broken Bow.

Those voting to strip the language were Johnnie Crutchfield, D-Ardmore; Ted Fisher, D-Sapulpa; and Keith Leftwich, D-Oklahoma City. Weedn, author of the bill, didn't get to vote because she is not a member of the transportation committee.

Staff writer Mick Hinton can be reached by e-mail at mhinton@oklahoman.com or by phone at 475-3105.

The NAFTA Corridor Bypass/Outer Loop: Media Snips

Prepared by Control The Loop Action Coalition
1108 W. Main, Suite 101, Norman, OK 73069 – (405) 579-7880

"He [Neil McCaleb, Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, Director of ODOT, Director of OTA] said his priorities include determining the most effective routes, and building roads...."

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"McCaleb acknowledged that public input in the highway planning process 'is not a democratic poll. Public input is taken into consideration, but the public is not in a position to make enlightened judgment about traffic modeling.'"

Neil McCaleb, Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, Director of ODOT, Director of OTA, Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"If we don't do this now, in five years, we might not be able to get the right-of-way for it...."

Marc Long, Cobb Engineering, Outer Loop MIS Contractor, Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"By the time we get through with this process, it will impact half a million people."

Marc Long, Cobb Engineering, Outer Loop MIS Contractor, Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"Transportation officials have said restrictive zoning or special legislation could be used to preserve land. However, they have not said how the state would acquire land from existing homeowners and businesses."

Norman Transcript, 12/30/98

"The subject of intimate [sic-*eminent*] domain and alternative transportation will be addressed at the meeting."

Edmond Sun, 01/14/99

"... learning how to preserve the corridor will go beyond local and state applications in the future."

Zac Taylor, ED of ACOG, Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

[Steve] Knox [Edmond City Councilor, Chairman of ACOG and MIS Steering Committee member] said none of the primary studies were designed to take into consideration residential neighborhoods...."

Edmond Sun, 01/10/99

"Knox said the criteria of any plans has [sic-have] nothing to do with residences...."
Edmond Sun, 01/10/99

"We dare not wait for the project to come to a vote before voicing our opposition...."
Editorial, Norman Transcript, 12/17/98

"The anemic approach to public notification of this project smacks of secrecy and avoidance of public dissent."
Letter, John Deen, Sunday Oklahoman, 12/20/98

"On Dec. 23, McCaleb met with representatives of the Norman Chamber of Commerce and announced the Zz option had been restored to the list of routes still under consideration."
Norman Transcript, 01/03/99 – [NOTE: A NEW Zz route was added, unstudied by the MIS.]

"...landowners shouldn't work themselves up over something that hasn't yet been finalized... This is not the time to panic yet,...."
Steve Knox, Edmond City Councilor, Chairman of ACOG and MIS Steering Committee member, Edmond Sun, 01/10/99

"Sierra Club spokesman Mike Opitz told [Norman] council members that... officials 'glossed over' the non-road options which call for improving mass transit and enhancing the existing road network rather than building new highways. 'The loop study is biased against non-road solutions. Their proposals are misleading, inaccurate and diversionary.'"
Norman Transcript, 01/13/99

"There are new alternatives people may want to consider."
Zac Taylor, ED of ACOG, Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"Examples of non-highway alternatives include light rail or vehicle lanes dedicated to cars with more than one occupant. And from evaluating all the non-highway options, the need for a highway may possibly be eliminated."
Marc Long, Cobb Engineering, Outer Loop MIS contractor, Edmond Sun, 01/21/99

"...there can be a loop built whether Norman agrees with it or not. It is not just a Norman issue...."
Norman City Planner Pat Copeland, The Daily/Norman Oklahoman, 01/15/99

"...[Norman] council member Shove said the council's ultimate responsibility was in maintaining the integrity of the 2020 plan, which protects the east Norman environment, the Garber-Wellington Aquifer and Norman's water supply. 'Local concerns are what matter most,' Shove said."
Norman Transcript, 01/13/99

"Will the construction of a highway bypass rampage through the rural area of East Norman? Not if the City Council and Norman citizens have a say."

Oklahoma Daily, 01/13/99

"The Norman City Council approved a resolution Tuesday opposing any of the options proposed for an outer loop.... Councilman Harold Harolson was one of the two members who opposed the resolution. He worried that without city input, state officials will do what they want."

Daily Oklahoman, 01/13/99

"Richard Massie, [Norman] director of planning, made it clear the city's view was not in favor of the loop as proposed."

Norman Transcript, 06/25/98

"It is my observation that the people of Norman are very concerned with the outcome of this study."

Marc Long, Cobb Engineering, Outer Loop MIS contractor, Norman Transcript, 06/25/98

"Obviously, the routes they proposed to us weren't in harmony with the desires of the citizens."

Norman Mayor Bob Thompson, The Daily/Norman Oklahoman, 01/15/99

"She [ODOT spokeswoman Terri Angier] said faxes and letters – even handwritten notes – are of more value than phone calls."

The Daily/Norman Oklahoman, 01/15/99

"Transportation Department officials say public input is important to the planning process, although none can say just how much clout public opinion carries, compared to other factors. Public response has been heavy, they say."

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"Transportation officials are still accepting public comments, but specific observations that provide direction are preferred."

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"The actual loop will only require 800 feet for the highway's width.... The exact placement within the two-mile-wide section will be determined based on which will cause the least impact...."

Norman Transcript, 01/24/99

"Taylor [Executive Director of ACOG] said citizens that become involved in the loop planning are making an investment into what Norman will look like in the next century."

Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"We want to make sure any proposals are compatible with their [the citizens'] visions of future land use."

Zac Taylor, ED of ACOG, Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"[ODOT] spokeswoman Terri Angier asked how Norman officials will participate in the process of selecting a route after passing a resolution opposing the loop entirely. 'We just can't understand why they would want to exclude themselves from the planning process.' Angier said the resolution will effect [sic] the study, but it may not have killed the possibility of loop construction in Norman."

The Daily/Norman Oklahoman, 01/15/99

"Marc Long, vice president of Cobb Engineering, said the proposed corridors could be altered or the study committee could recommend no highway be built."

Daily Oklahoman, 01/20/99

"City officials view the situation with some concern, according to City Planner Pat Copeland."

Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"The loop, which officials maintain is still in the conceptual stages, would be an alternative route to I-35. If I-35 is to become the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] Corridor, the need for a loop will rise accordingly,' according to Zac Taylor, Executive Director of the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments."

Norman Transcript, 06/14/98

"Research from NAFTA Coalition shows there is a relationship between the I-35 bypass and the outer loop...."

Neil McCaleb, Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, Director of ODOT, Director of OTA, Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"The bypass would begin near Wayne where a Customs Center, the 'Mid-Continent Gateway Project,' is proposed. The legislature [sic-the Federal Highway Bill] has appropriated \$1 million for a study into the feasibility of the customs checkpoint, where trucks from Mexico would receive clearance for passage through the state."

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"June's federal highway bill provided \$1 million for a feasibility study for an international trade center in McClain County but more money is needed from local sources before the study can begin.... Robert Hendrick, an engineer and project director for the McClain County public trust, said the county doesn't have the 20% matching funds. Trade center boosters will try to get the Legislature to appropriate money to pay the matching funds, Hendrick said."

Daily Oklahoma, 12/08/98

"Still unresolved is an argument over Mexican trucking. In 1995, citing safety concerns, the Clinton administration blocked implementation of a NAFTA provision that would allow Mexican haulers to carry goods into California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas."

Norman Transcript, 01/08/99

"City officials say such a connection, traveled by as many as 30,000 heavy trucks a day, would be devastating to environmentally fragile land...."

Norman Transcript, 12/15/98

"The Steering Committee... outlined the importance of the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA] and the designation of Interstate 35 as a major trade corridor as key reasons for the need of a loop. [Terry] McFall [of ODOT] said the Outer Loop study would meld into a present I-35 trade corridor study."

Norman Transcript, 06/25/98

"Marc Long, of Cobb Engineering, said the committee was trying to find out what needs to be done and then how to do it so that it could be incorporated into the I-35 study."

Norman Transcript, 06/25/98

"Zac Taylor, of ACOG, said preservation of desired land use was the key concept on every level of the study."

Norman Transcript, 06/25/98

"Will the Outer Loop be a turnpike or a freeway? McCaleb said the decision won't be made for perhaps another 20 years.... 'The Turnpike Authority has been a viable alternative to using highway funds.'"

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"Transportation officials have not discarded the idea of making the outer loop a turnpike."

Norman Transcript, 12/30/98

"We are not eliminating the turnpike method -- but a process is required to achieve federal funds."

Marc Long, Cobb Engineering, Outer Loop MIS contractor, Edmond Sun,
01/21/99

"[Steve] Knox [Edmond City Councilor, Chairman of ACOG and MIS Steering Committee member] also agreed that the conception of a toll-road has not been decided."

Edmond Sun, 01/21/99

"Portions of the loop already in place or under construction include the Kilpatrick Turnpike in north Oklahoma City and the H.E. Bailey Spur Turnpike west of Norman."

Daily/Norman Oklahoman, 12/30/98

"Much of the loop's northern and western segments have already been established by the Turner and Kilpatrick Turnpikes."

Edmond Sun, 01/14/99 and Norman Transcript, 12/24/98

"Turnpikes already comprise the first legs of the Outer Loop, so 'it seems reasonable the Turnpike Authority will be a player,' McCaleb said. Much of the groundwork for the outer loop was completed for a turnpike program proposed by former Governor David Walters. The plan failed to gain legislative support."

Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"In the last 50 years, if you take out the Interstate system, Oklahoma has built only four miles of limited access, grade separated [non-toll road] state highways."

Neil McCaleb, Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation, Director of ODOT, Director of OTA, Norman Transcript, 01/03/99

"The highway would not be funded and constructed for at least 20 years, according to transportation officials."

Edmond Sun, 01/14/99

"Portions of the loop are not expected to be constructed for at least 20 years."

Norman Transcript, 12/24/98

"Engineering and transportation officials will select one route the spring of 2000." [sic-1999]

Edmond Sun, 01/10/99

"The nearest freeway to Mustang, Interstate 40, is almost four miles to the north.... 'We have some people who want this to be the precious little community that it's been,' he [Mustang Mayor Ross Duckett] said."

Daily Oklahoman, 01/20/99

"Many other cities are closely following the actions of an advisory committee of city officials and civic and business leaders studying proposed loop routes. Steve Eddy, Moore Assistant City Manager, is on the committee. 'We'd like to see it built,' Eddy said. 'It would potentially bring people through who might stop for a hamburger.'"

Daily Oklahoman, 01/20/99