

## Chapter 5: Public Participation

**H**istorically, the opportunities for formal public input into the planning process for the Foothills Parkway have been relatively limited. Public meetings have been held as a part of the environmental assessment work on Sections B and D, but little opportunity has been otherwise provided.

Holistic planning regarding the Parkway location, basic design parameters and associated amenities was primarily accomplished between passage of the Congressional mandate in 1944 and publication of the *Foothills Parkway Master Plan* in 1968, although the Foothills Parkway was reconfirmed as an element of the 1982 *General Management Plan, Great Smoky Mountains National Park*. Public input was not considered a significant element of planning during that period, planning and design being considered a more pure governmental function. Further, more than three decades have passed since this more holistic planning was accomplished, giving additional emphasis to the need for gauging public sentiment as a part of the reevaluation process.

As a result, this planning effort placed substantial emphasis on obtaining input from Gateway area governmental

leaders, stakeholders and the general public.

### 5.1 *Public Input Plan*

The public involvement element of the Foothills Parkway Analysis developed from the Regional Transportation Alternatives Plan (RTAP) process, which included a ten county area. The Foothills Parkway Analysis concentrated on the three counties through which the Foothills Parkway passes: Cocke, Sevier and Blount. Interviews with governmental leaders and stakeholders in those counties dealt in part with the Foothills Parkway, and public comment was sought independent of RTAP. Primary plan elements include:

- Identifying individual and organizational stakeholders;
- Conducting interviews with local government leaders in the three counties;
- Conducting interviews with other stakeholders;
- Conducting three Public Scoping Meetings;
- Conducting three additional public meetings to report the study results; and
- Documenting comments through comment cards, on-site recording with a court reporter and accepting

electronic and regular mail responses.

## 5.2 *Public Input Process*

A total of eighteen interviews were conducted with individual and organizational stakeholders including local government officials. These interviews included:

- Cocke County Executive;
- Sevier County Executive;
- Blount County Executive;
- Mayor of Newport;
- Mayor of Pittman Center;
- City Manager of Gatlinburg;
- Mayor of Pigeon Forge;
- City Manager of Pigeon Forge;
- Mayor and City Planner of Sevierville;
- City Manager of Sevierville;
- Mayor and Vice Mayor of Townsend;
- City Manager of Alcoa;
- Executive Director, Sevier County Economic Development Council;
- President, Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation (GGF);
- General Manager, Dollywood Theme Park;
- National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA);
- Chairman, Tennessee Park Commission; and
- Vice Chairman, Tennessee Park Commission.

A series of ten public meetings, one per county, associated with the larger RTAP project was held early in the study process. The Foothills Parkway Analysis element and its association with Foothills Parkway was introduced and attendees were advised that

separate meetings would be held to gain input on that project element.

Three Public Scoping Meetings were held midway through the planning process, two in Gatlinburg and one in Townsend. Attendees were provided a “fact sheet” on the study. The meeting format consisted of a PowerPoint slide presentation of the project elements followed by a lengthy period for attendees to review a series of four displays: History and Purpose of Study, Traffic Considerations, Visitor Experience and Construction Related Considerations. The review period provided the opportunity for informal, one-on-one information exchanges with the project staff. Opportunities for formal input were provided through a written questionnaire, verbal comments to a court reporter and/or electronic mail to the Park office.

Three additional public meetings were held at the conclusion of the study to inform the public of the study process and findings. These meetings were held in Newport, Gatlinburg and Townsend. Attendees were again provided a fact sheet and a written questionnaire. The meeting format consisted of a PowerPoint slide presentation and a formal question/answer session which was recorded in full by a court reporter. Attendees were asked to complete the questionnaire and were also given the opportunity for communication via electronic or regular mail to the Park office.

Included in the Appendix are copies of the two fact sheets, the two

questionnaires and the two PowerPoint presentation slide sets.

### *5.3 Public Input Results*

The following paragraphs summarize the input from interviews and the two sets of public meetings.

#### *5.3.1 Interviews*

Notes from each of the 18 interviews are provided in the Appendix. All elected and appointed local government officials interviewed strongly favored further construction of the Parkway with one exception. Some officials felt more strongly about completing Sections B, E and F than C and D if funding continued to be a problem. The Mayor of Pittman Center did not oppose further construction but is not a strong supporter; he expressed doubt that it would ever be completed but did strongly recommend that Section B be combined with U.S. 321 (herein referred to as Section B Alternate) if it is further pursued. Other government officials of the area directly affected by Section B Alternate expressed a willingness to combine these two roadways as well.

Representatives of Dollywood and the Sevier County Economic Development Council expressed reservations about further construction, citing the high cost for completion, and suggesting that the decision-making process consider other local priorities. The Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation (GGF) representative noted that that organization typically did not of itself “take sides” but rather provided a forum and mechanism for discussion, evaluation and change. He personally expressed concern about the

environmental impacts and indicated that the Section B/U.S. 321 combination should be given thorough consideration if Section B is pursued.

The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) representatives said that their organization had not yet taken a position on the matter. It was noted that the Park and Parkway areas are nationally significant resources and that further development should be preceded by logical analysis of more detailed information on goals, intended use, preservation of viewsheds, environmental impacts of construction and related concerns. He cautioned against its use as a “commuter route.”

The Tennessee Great Smoky Mountains National Park Commission is an official organization of the State of Tennessee which provides liaison to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Chairman and Vice Chairman in separate interviews both expressed extremely strong sentiment toward completion of the Parkway. They noted that there is a compelling national interest involved, that they feel the best views of the Park are from the uncompleted sections, that there is a long-standing contract between the State and Federal governments which should be honored, and that there has never been a strong legislative champion for the project. Much of the local sentiment expressed by the public at the public scoping meetings mirrors that of the National Park Commission.

#### *5.3.2 Public Scoping Meetings*

A series of three Public Scoping

Meetings was held on 2-3 April 2001. Two meetings were held in Gatlinburg on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, one during the normal workday and a second that evening. The third meeting was held in Townsend on 3 April 2001. A total of 197 persons attended the three meetings. A total of 109 responses were received including questionnaires turned in at the meeting, e-mails, faxes, letters and comments to the court reporter. Figure 17 summarizes the results.

Of the 109 responses, a total of 60 respondents (55%) favored completing the entire Parkway in a timely manner. An additional 19 respondents (17%) favored completion of Sections E and F but not Sections B, C and D. Twenty-four respondents (22%) did not support additional construction and 6% did not indicate a position. Reasons cited for completing the Parkway included enhancing the visitor experience, relieving traffic congestion inside and outside the Park and an obligation to fulfill the mandate. Reasons cited for stopping further construction included the expense of construction and concern about environmental impact.

Other themes included:

- An overwhelming majority desire options to the personal vehicle in providing the visitor experience. Transportation options such as rail, bus, trolley, hiking, biking and horseback riding were mentioned; realizing that some were dependent on the final build/no-build decision.
- There was strong support for keeping the right-of-way under

- National Park Service control regardless of whether the Parkway is built.
- The Town of Pittman Center presented a recommendation for an alternate alignment that would combine Section B of the Parkway with U.S. 321. (Note: This proposal, herein referred to as “Section B Alternate”, was reviewed as a part of the study).
- Cocke County representatives and residents voiced strong support for completion regardless of the alignment.
- Six respondents at the Townsend meeting discussed an additional Parkway interchange at Carr Creek; the respondents were evenly split for and against the proposal.

Copies of the attendance rosters and written responses are on file at the Park Headquarters.

### *5.3.3 Final Public Meetings*

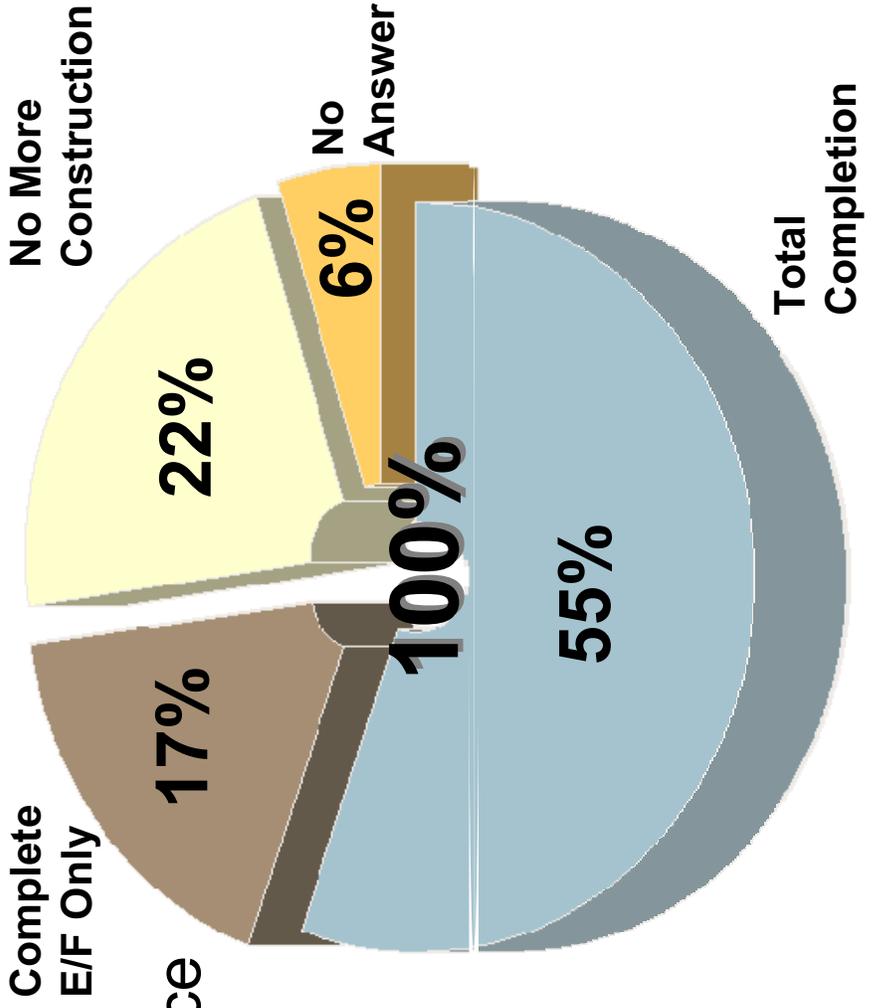
Three additional public meetings were held to present the conclusions of the study and to again receive public input. A total of 128 persons attended the meetings, which were held on 23 July 2001 in Gatlinburg, 24 July in Newport and 26 July in Townsend.

A total of 56 completed questionnaires were returned. Of the total, 42 respondents (75%) favored completion of the full 72-mile roadway, 13 (23%) were opposed and 1 (2%) was undecided. Table 8 presents a summary of the questions and responses.

Figure 17. Public Scoping Meeting

April 2-3, 2001 in Gatlinburg and Townsend –  
197 attendees, 109 responses

- Why build?
  - enhanced visitor experience
  - relieve traffic congestion
  - obligation to mandate
- Why not build?
  - expense
  - environmental impacts



## Table 8. Foothills Parkway Public Meeting - July 23-25, 2001

Survey Summary-- 56 completed surveys (as of 8/31)

Total Attendance-- 128

	Yes	No	Other	Comments
Given current information, do you favor completion of all 72 miles of the Foothills Parkway? Yes No Explain.	42	13	1 - undecided	2 - Qualified yes answers: . 1 - If Pittman Center Proposal w/public transit; 1 - If too expensive don't do Sections B and D 1 - Supports the "Circle-the-Smokies" Scenic Drive concept.
Would you favor partial completion of the remaining sections? Yes No If yes, which sections and why.	17	30	7 - left blank 2 - undecided	1 - Section B as Highway 321 1 - Need comprehensive study of corridor between Gatlinburg and Cosby 4 - In favor of B; 1 - C; 1 - B/C; 1 - E thru H; 1 - E/F; 1 - D/E 2 - Favor partial completion only if entire 72 miles is not going to be constructed. 1 - Sections C and D as monorail - less disruption to soils and vegetation.
Should an alternative form of transportation be considered along with or instead of one or more sections? Yes No Explain.	33	22	1 - unclear	13 - Favor hiking, biking or scenic trails; 8 - rail, bus or trolley; 3 - no rail. 1 - Propone powered buses for subsidized sightseeing. Trails will not do the job. 1 -Hiking and biking trails along with not in place of. 1 -Traffic in the park should be limited not encouraged.
Would you prefer the "No Build" option for Sections B, C and/or D? Yes No Explain.	12	36	5 3 - left blank	3 - Plan similar to Pittman Ctr. Proposal 1 - Buffer for animals 3 - Stated environmental concerns 1 - If sections B, C and D not completed - no relief to Park roads 2 - Too many roads already.
If one or more sections of the Parkway are not constructed, what should be done with the existing ROW? 1.NPS retain and use for recreation and trails; 2.NPS retain in an undeveloped state; 3. Return ROW to state.	36 8 1		11	1 - Views would be too spectacular to miss. If going to do it, then do it. 4 - Checked both 1 and 2 4 - Return to original owner 2 - Left blank
Do you agree that heavier traffic volume detracts from the visitor experience of viewing the Park? Yes No. If yes, favor limiting traffic during peak times?	32	10	14 - left blank	10 - Agree heavy traffic detracts but against limiting traffic. 1 - Doubt there will ever be that much traffic on the FHP. 2 - Second yes, dependent on method of limitation.
Are home, cabins and other such structures significant detriment to the viewsheds toward the Park? Yes No Explain	21	30	2 - left blank 3 - general comment	1 - Control visual experience through zoning; 1- 321 uncontrolled growth will be as tacky as Highway 66 1 - Commercial development will continue between Gatlinburg and Cosby 2 - Blue Ridge Parkway and Natchez Trace both have areas of residential development. People like to see how "others" live. 1 - TN has no control over mountain top construction. 2 - Degree of density - a few are not objectionable yet a large subdivision would be objectionable. 1 - Need legislation like North Carolina has had since 1980s protecting ridge tops. 1- Government should not try to control private property or an individual's

Additional comments:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Need to look at entire transportation corridor between Gatlinburg and Cosby- not at individual projects.</li> <li>2. Strongly oppose any further construction.</li> <li>3. Use 321 as Parkway through Section B (Pittman Ctr. Proposal)</li> <li>4. Completion of entire parkway is the best option.</li> <li>5. Decisions should be made on long-term benefit to Park and not on preliminary costs.</li> <li>6. Carr Creek exit a must to preserve Townsend</li> <li>7. No exit at Carr Creek</li> <li>8. Hiking, biking trail options are viable alternatives.</li> <li>9. Impressed with the thoroughness of research and presentation.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Excellent opportunity for visitors to experience the Park w/o impacting roads within the Park.</li> <li>11. Can do anything in an environmentally sound manner. Mountaintop destruction rivals billboard desecration of the natural beauty TN has to present to the world.</li> <li>12. Need to purchase development rights of mountain ridges.</li> <li>13. Complete "missing link"; build trails on C and B to preserve; complete E and F; complete B as scenic alternative to 321; complete C then complete D.</li> <li>14. Don't complete. If anything finish F and use the rest for trails.</li> </ol> |
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There continued to be strong support for the National Park Service to retain the right-of-way of any uncompleted sections and to use it for trails if practical.

Copies of the attendance roster, completed questionnaires and the text of the question/answer session are available at Park Headquarters.