



Foothills Parkway



Section 8B

Environmental Impact Statement

March 2007

Welcome...

Welcome to tonight's meeting for the Foothills Parkway Section 8B Project.

The purpose of tonight's meeting is to provide you with information regarding the proposed project. You will have an opportunity to receive project information, review study area maps and displays, talk with project team members, and offer your input.

Your Input is Important

Sign In and Collect a Handout

Please sign in at the registration table and provide your mailing address to receive future project information and to help us document public participation in the workshop.

Learn About the Project

Project displays and other project materials are available to help you learn about the project.

Ask Questions

Project team members are available to answer your questions about the proposed project.

Provide Your Input

This information packet includes a comment sheet. We look forward to receiving your input. The information that you provide will help identify key concerns and issues regarding the proposed project. Please submit your comments tonight or mail your comments to the address on the comment sheet postmarked by April 20, 2007.



Visit Us on the Web

The project website provides detailed information on the proposed project in a downloadable and printable format. The website also contains a comment submission form to submit your comments.

Project website: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grsm>

Select: *Foothills Parkway Section 8B Environmental Impact Statement*



Why Is the Project Needed?

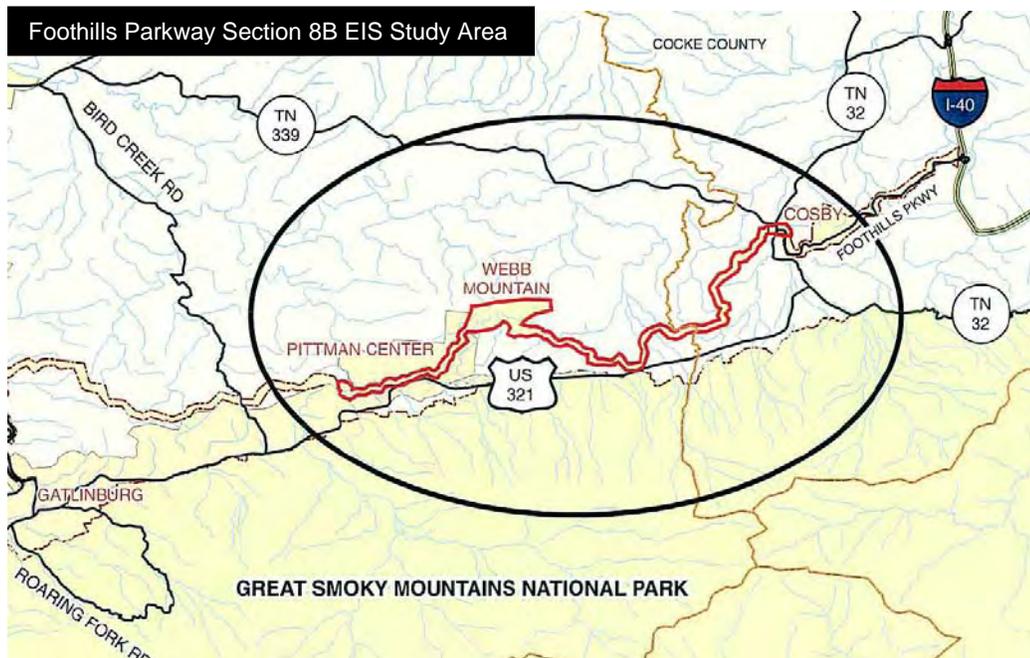
The purpose of this project is to provide scenic views of the Great Smoky Mountains and provide access to other recreational opportunities along Section 8B of the Foothills Parkway. The planning study will evaluate alternatives and determine appropriate development for this section of the Foothills Parkway.

The need for the Foothills Parkway was initially identified in the 1944 Congressional action, which “authorized the acceptance of donations of land for the construction of a scenic parkway to provide an appropriate view of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park from the Tennessee side of the park, and for other purposes....” As envisioned by Congress and confirmed in the *Foothills Parkway Master Plan*, the 72-mile scenic parkway would provide visitors with views of the Smoky Mountains from a sufficient distance and height to permit full appreciation of their grandeur, extent, and height.

About the Project

The Foothills Parkway is a scenic parkway located in eastern Tennessee along the northern boundary of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Foothills Parkway was planned to extend from Chilhowee eastward to an intersection with I-40 east of Cosby through Blount, Sevier, and Cocke counties. Of the 72 miles of roadway originally planned for the Foothills Parkway (see map on page 9), approximately 23 miles (Sections 8A, 8G, and 8H) have been completed and are open to traffic. An additional 15 miles (Sections 8E and 8F) are under construction. **The focus of this project is specifically on the 14-mile section of parkway between Pittman Center and Cosby, Section 8B, one of the three remaining sections of parkway to be constructed.**

The park-owned right-of-way obtained for Section 8B averages 1,000 feet wide. This section would connect to Section 8C to the west (planned to extend from the Gatlinburg Spur [US 441] to Pittman Center) and to Section 8A to the east (which is open to traffic and extends from Cosby to I-40).



Project History & Timeline

Years	Description of Activity
1944	Congress enacted legislation to construct a parkway along the Tennessee side of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park to provide scenic views of the Park.
1947	The state of Tennessee confirmed its support for the concept and the proposed road was identified as the "Foothills Parkway."
1968	The <i>Foothills Parkway Master Plan</i> was prepared.
1979	The state of Tennessee completed acquisition of all of the property needed for the project and transferred the land to the federal government.
1982	The parkway and associated facilities were included in concept in the Park's <i>1982 General Management Plan</i> .
1996	Conceptual design plans for construction of a parkway through Section 8B were completed.
1999	The <i>Foothills Parkway Section 8B Final Environmental Report</i> was completed.
2002	The <i>Foothills Parkway Analysis Report</i> was completed.
2006	Began environmental planning process to evaluate the 14.1-mile section (Section 8B) that extends from Pittman Center to Cosby, Tennessee.

Past Studies & Documentation

Several studies have been conducted by the National Park Service for the Foothills Parkway, including specific evaluations of Section 8B. Information from previous plans and studies will be supplemented with additional analysis to develop the *Foothills Parkway Section 8B Environmental Impact Statement* (EIS). Highlights from key studies include:

Foothills Parkway Master Plan, 1968

- included information pertaining to the location of the Foothills Parkway, visitor amenities, and visual resources
- emphasized that "...the landscape and the recreation of the region are more important considerations rather than the road itself...[and that]...there must be a distinguishing characteristic of natural beauty or other quality that causes the location to stand out among other recreational driving opportunities"
- stated that "...until all [72] miles of the parkway are completed and major traffic arteries and related accesses to Great Smoky Mountains National Park are connected, full utilization of the parkway as a nationally significant scenic recreational resource will not be achieved"

Foothills Parkway Section 8B Final Environmental Report, 1999

- considered two basic alternatives: (1) a build alternative (parkway) with a number of options, and (2) a no-build alternative
- documented the existing environmental conditions of the study area and the analysis of potential impacts to a variety of resources, including: geology, soils, water resources, aquatic ecology, terrestrial ecology, air quality, socioeconomics, aesthetics, and cultural resources

Foothills Parkway Analysis Report, 2002

- provided an in-depth assessment of the Foothills Parkway corridor in context with the Congressional mandate, the mission of the Park, the regional transportation network and the gateway communities
- considered completion options and related impacts of Sections 8B, 8C, and 8D
- considered scenic views, traffic volumes, visitor experience, environmental impacts, and construction impacts
- concluded that completing the Parkway would best achieve the goals associated with the Congressional mandate and previous Park plans, providing views of the Park, an enhanced visitor experience, improved connections to regional roadways, and traffic reductions on roadways within and outside of the Park

These documents are available for viewing on the project website.

Foothills Parkway Section 8B EIS

While the above-described studies provide information on the planning and environmental aspects of the Foothills Parkway Section 8B, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) guidelines require preparation of an EIS to evaluate alternatives and disclose the anticipated impacts to the natural and human environments associated with the proposed project.

An EIS is a report that discloses information obtained from a comprehensive study of potential environmental impacts related to federal actions. A key and required component of the EIS process is to solicit the public's input about their concerns and preferences and subsequently share the study findings with the public and obtain feedback. Projects for which an EIS is required are defined in the NEPA of 1969, as amended. An EIS is prepared in two steps: a Draft EIS, which is circulated to the public, and a Final EIS, which records public comments and responses to those comments, and finalizes commitments.

The *Foothills Parkway Section 8B EIS* will incorporate and build upon prior planning efforts and environmental studies. This will include reviewing comments and suggestions provided by the public during these studies. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), National Park Service (NPS), their consultant ARCADIS, and other federal, state, and local government partners will work together to develop the EIS for Foothills Parkway Section 8B.

Project Goals and Objectives

NPS guidelines on the NEPA process encourage the development of project goals and objectives to document what the Park should accomplish for the project to be considered a success. While addressing the proposed project's purpose and need and ensuring that resources within GSMNP are unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations, the following are some of the goals and objectives that have been identified to date:

- Create new opportunities for scenic views of GSMNP and for recreational activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, photography, and interpretive opportunities.
- Protect natural resources and ecosystems (vegetation communities, water resources, threatened and endangered species) in the areas where natural processes dominate.
- Protect cultural resources (archeological sites and historic structures).
- Protect visual resources of GSMNP and nearby communities.
- Develop alternatives that minimize areas of disturbance.

Proposed Concepts

Several concepts have been proposed for the project and will be considered in the development of the EIS. These include: No Action, Foothills Parkway, Foothills Trail, and Combination Parkway & Trail. These concepts take into consideration the results of previous planning efforts, including comments and suggestions provided by the public. Detailed study alternatives will be developed after suggestions and comments provided by the public during the scoping process are given full consideration. Review of legislative intent may be required as concepts are evaluated and alternatives are developed.

Please refer to comment sheet question #2 to provide comments on the following proposed concepts or comment sheet question #3 if you have suggestions for new, modified, or combined concepts.

No Action

The proposed action would not take place and the existing conditions within the study area would continue under current management practices.

Foothills Parkway

An approximately 14-mile, two-lane, paved roadway would extend from Pittman Center to Cosby. The roadway would be studied with or without a paved bike lane. Various options have been suggested:

- **Western Terminus Options (in the vicinity of Pittman Center)**
 - (1) No interchanges (to connect directly to Section 8C); or
 - (2) An interchange at SR 416; or
 - (3) An interchange with US 321.
- **Webb Mountain Options**
 - (1) A parking area along the edge of the parkway; or
 - (2) A spur road leading to an overlook facility.

Foothills Trail

An approximately 14-mile trail would extend from Pittman Center to Cosby. Trailhead parking would be located within the existing right-of-way with access from existing roadways. Three different trail types are being considered:

Potential Trail Type	Uses	Surface	Trail Width*	Clearing Width*	Tree Canopy
(1) Single-use Trail	hiking horse use, or mountain biking	natural or soft surface	2-3 feet	3-5 feet	Low
(2) Multi-use Trail (natural/soft surface)	various potential uses	natural or soft surface	3-5 feet	5-7 feet	Some tree canopy clearing
(3) Multi-use Trail (asphalt surface)	various potential uses	asphalt surface	10-12 feet	10-16 feet	Some tree canopy clearing

* Trail and clearing widths are approximate.

Foothills Parkway/Foothills Trail (combination)

An approximately 6-mile roadway would extend from Cosby to Rocky Flats. This section of the parkway would connect to US 321 in the vicinity of Rocky Flats.

- combined with -

An approximately 8-mile trail (single-use or multi-use) would extend from Rocky Flats to Pittman Center. Trailhead parking would be located within the existing right-of-way with access from existing roadways. Three different trail types are currently being considered (*Refer to the above Foothills Trail concept for trail descriptions*).

Preliminary Impact Topics

Impact topics refer to specific resources that may be affected by a proposed project. Issues and concerns identified by the public, agencies, resource specialists, and others are considered when developing impact topics. During the EIS planning process, analyses are conducted to determine the magnitude of impact each detailed study alternative is anticipated to have on a particular resource. The results of these analyses, as summarized in the Draft EIS, provide the basis for evaluating and comparing detailed study alternatives.

Issues identified during previous planning efforts for Foothills Parkway Section 8B led to the development of the following preliminary impact topics. The topics presented below are proposed to be analyzed in the EIS. The list below may be modified, pending additional input from the public, as well as resource and regulatory agencies.

Human environment

- Traffic
- Socioeconomic conditions (population, housing, economics, etc.)
- Land use
- Public health & safety
- Visitor use and experience
- Aesthetics and visual resources

Cultural resources

- Archeological sites
- Historic structures

Physical resources

- Geology and soils
- Air quality
- Soundscapes

Water resources

- Wetlands
- Floodplains
- Water quality

Biological resources

- Vegetation communities
- Terrestrial wildlife
 - Black bears
 - Migratory birds
- Aquatic wildlife
- Protected species
- Invasive species

Please refer to comment sheet question #4 if you have any comments regarding the preliminary impact topics.

Fieldwork in Your Area

The study team will be conducting fieldwork and research in and around the Foothills Parkway Section 8B right-of-way to obtain information about natural resources; geologic resources; community resources; and historic and archaeological resources. Field surveys will be conducted by biologists and other field specialists to evaluate the ecological communities and protected resources within the study area. To evaluate scenic views throughout the project study area, visual (aesthetic) resources analyses are also being conducted. In addition, the study team will be assessing the potential socioeconomic impacts of the EIS study alternatives on local communities and park visitors.

Anticipated Planning Process

NEPA requires a series of milestones to be met while developing and finalizing an EIS. The Anticipated Planning Process table provided on the following page indicates these major steps.

Currently, the EIS process is at the project scoping phase. During the scoping phase, the agencies will solicit public input through a variety of media to identify issues relating to the proposed project. Detailed study alternatives will be developed after suggestions and comments from the public are given full consideration, potential concepts and previous studies are reviewed, and a review of existing study area conditions for the natural and human environments has been performed. The EIS will incorporate and build upon the prior planning efforts, environmental studies, and public input (as identified on pages 3 and 4 of this handout). All of the collected information will form the basis for developing alternative ways of implementing the project and eventually selecting a preferred alternative.

The preferred alternative will be identified in the Draft EIS. NPS will make the decision regarding selecting an alternative in a Record of Decision.

What's Next?

The next series of public meetings will present the EIS study alternatives and discuss their associated impacts and costs. After comments have been collected and analyzed during the Impact Analysis Phase, the DEIS will be completed and made available for public review. Information on the dates, times, and locations of the next public meeting series will be announced in a project mailing and on the website once they have been scheduled.

Anticipated Planning Process

Step	Planning Activity
1	Public Scoping Phase (We are Here)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review regulations and project history. • Identify the purpose and need, goals and objectives, and impact topics for the proposed project. • Review proposed concepts for the project. • Provide the first project newsletter to announce the public scoping meetings. • Conduct meetings for public scoping, outreach, and agency coordination. • Collect and analyze public input.
2	Existing Conditions Phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess existing data for project study area. • Collect data on natural and cultural resources, human environment, the transportation network, and other relevant data. • Document existing conditions of the study area.
3	Alternatives Development Phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine proposed concepts and/or consider concepts recommended through public input. • Develop preliminary study alternatives.
4	Impact Analysis Phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze impacts to the human, natural, and cultural environments (impact topics). • Develop final study alternatives, including developing plans and/or detailing concepts for the alternatives. • Provide the second project newsletter to announce the public meetings. • Conduct public meetings to review the final study alternatives and the proposed impacts. • Collect and analyze public input.
5	Draft Environmental Impact Statement Phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and publish the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) with detailed study alternatives and an impact assessment. • Release the DEIS for public comment. • Provide the third project newsletter to announce the release of the DEIS and public hearings. • Conduct public hearings to receive comments on the DEIS. • Collect and analyze public input.
6	Final Environmental Impact Statement Phase
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reply to substantive comments received at the public hearings and during the comment period for the DEIS. • Review findings for the alternatives. • Prepare and publish the Final EIS (FEIS). • Develop the fourth project newsletter to announce the availability of the FEIS.
7	Record of Decision
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare and publish the Record of Decision in the Federal Register and other media.
8	Implement Project Decisions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement project decisions.

Foothills Parkway Sections and Status

