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THURSDAY
SEPT. 20, 2007

50¢

BELLA VISTA BYPASS

Consultant Finds Funding Gap

TOLLS WON'T COVER COSTS, OFFICIALS SAY

By Rob Moritz
THE MORNING NEWS
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LITTLE ROCK — Higher construction costs and lower toll estimates create a \$139 million gap in funding for the planned Bella Vista bypass, according to a consultant's report presented Wednesday to the state Highway Commission.

Commission members said the design phase and acquisition of right of way for the project, which would bypass the busy U.S. 71 through Bella Vista and north to Missouri, would continue while they try to find another source of revenue to cover the additional cost.

"The project is still a viable ongoing project," Commission Chairman Jonathan Barnett of Siloam Springs said. "The purpose and the need is still the same. It's still a priority ... we just have to find \$139 million."

If the money can't be found, he said, the commission may opt to move forward with the project and "pay as you go."

Bella Vista Mayor Frank Anderson said the biggest thing he was looking forward to with the construction of a bypass was that it would alleviate traffic congestion on U.S. 71.

"There's only the one north/south corridor and it's just filling up," Anderson said. "I think it's going to get continually worse during the next three or four years."

He said the city will likely have to campaign to get something done about their traffic problems if the bypass isn't built.

Anderson said he has not been planning for a lot of development on the west side of Bella Vista in response to the bypass. He said he doesn't believe there would be a lot of development on a toll road because there is more hassle to get on and off than on a normal interstate. There is not much development



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Traffic travels Wednesday along U.S. 71 in Bella Vista.

on the toll road to Tulsa, Okla., he said.

Michael Malone, executive director of the Northwest Arkansas Council, a group that helps plan and coordinate regional projects, said he was disappointed the bypass could not move forward as a 100 percent toll-funded project.

"We're pleased to see they are continuing with the project, continuing to acquire right of way and moving forward with the design," he said, adding it may be possible for a regional mobility authority to be created in Northwest Arkansas to help address the funding shortfall.

The Legislature this year approved a measure allowing cities and counties to form regional groups to look at traffic problems.

The legislation gave regional mobility authorities more flexibility in raising money for transportation projects, Malone said. Such an authority is now being created in Benton and Washington counties, he said.

Last year, as the commission was discussing the feasibility of

using toll roads to pay for the Bella Vista project, consultants estimated the project would cost about \$210 million.

The toll plan called for motorists in passenger cars to pay \$1.50 to travel the entire 15-mile route, which would eventually take more than 50 percent traffic now using U.S. 71. Truck drivers would pay \$6 for the entire route.

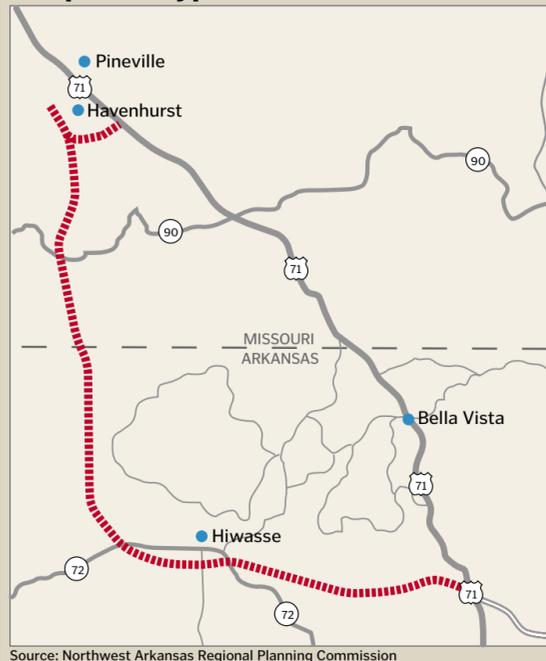
On Wednesday, different consultants, hired to do an "investment-grade" study of the project, said higher construction costs have pushed the price tag for the project to about \$225 million, and that the amount of traffic expected to use the toll road is less than projected last year.

Also, the 2006 study assumed all vehicles would pay the full amount on the toll road and travel on the main lane.

The report presented Wednesday said many of the vehicles would not travel on the main lane, but on shorter sections, which would cost 25 cents or 50 cents.

SEE BYPASS PAGE 2A

Proposed Bypass Route



Source: Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission

MICHELLE OBANA • THE MORNING NEWS

Board Plans To Push Zoning

MEMBERS OK VIDEO PROJECT

By Scarlet Sims

THE MORNING NEWS • SSIMS@NWAONLINE.NET

BENTONVILLE — A video touting the benefits of zoning in Benton County is in the works.

Planning Director Ashley Pope passed out an outline on the video's main points during the Benton County Planning Board meeting Wednesday. The video is part of the public education campaign to garner support for a general plan and zoning. The video will show how the government protects property and people, what incentives zoning has for individuals and businesses and how zoning helps planning. The board agreed to the outline.

The video will also show the rapid growth in Benton County, using past photographs, according to the outline. No one has been picked to be the "voice" of the video, but Pope plans to seek a broadcast student from the University of Arkansas.

The video will use 15 second clips featuring still-frame pictures of incompatible structures, and possibly some action video, Pope said. Planning Board members suggested Pope use other counties' incompatible structures.

Pope proposed delaying the project to develop a general plan earlier this month. The Planning Board had wanted to start the process immediately after requesting a resolution of support from the Quorum Court. However, justices of the peace supported a public awareness campaign before approving a resolution.

SEE PLANNERS PAGE 2A

CELL TOWER APPROVED
RESORT-TYPE DEVELOPMENT OK'D
PAGE 2A

Seniors To Graduate Week Later Than Usual

By Lana F. Flowers
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Seniors at area high schools will sit in class a few more days before moving tassels to the other sides of their mortarboards.

Area high schools must hold graduation ceremonies a week later than usual after state Department of Education officials were not in class the required 178 days each school year.

Kay Jacoby, Bentonville schools executive director of secondary programs, said local administrators negotiated with Bud Walton Arena representa-

SEE SENIORS PAGE 2A

GETTING STARTED

IN THE NEWS

Simpson Back In Courtroom



LAS VEGAS — In a scene of legal deja vu, a grayer, heavier O.J. Simpson stood handcuffed in court Wednesday to face charges that could put him

behind bars for life. The prosecutor who failed to get him a dozen years ago was there to watch, and news cameras tracked his every move as if they were covering a slow-speed chase.

FULL STORY, 1B



Ugandans Seek Ties With Arkansas

Ugandan officials met with Wal-Mart Stores Inc. yesterday to discuss a deal that could land millions of pounds of coffee on the retailers shelves and to pursue ties with Arkansas.

FULL STORY, 1D

Beebe Disclaims Knowledge Of 2005 Law

LITTLE ROCK — Gov. Mike Beebe said Wednesday he didn't know about a 2005 state law allowing the Arkansas State police to enforce immigration law, though his Republican opponent in last year's election repeatedly cited the law as a means to combat illegal immigration.

FULL STORY, 7A

Mexican National Sentenced To 10 Years In Bicyclist's Death

By Robin Mero

THE MORNING NEWS • RMERO@NWAONLINE.NET

BENTONVILLE — Years of police work and cooperation from immigration officials culminated Wednesday in bringing to justice a man who hit a bicyclist in 2004 then fled the scene.

Lazaro Andrade Lobaton, now 21, was sentenced to 10 years in prison for manslaughter in the death of Brandon Haley, 31, a father of three who was riding his bicycle one Sunday morning on Arkansas 68 east of Siloam Springs.

After striking Haley and causing fatal head injuries, Lobaton fled the scene and soon left the country for his native Mexico. He was captured in Alabama last November. A second felony charge of leaving the scene of a personal injury accident was

SEE LOBATON PAGE 2A



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Lazaro Lobaton is escorted Wednesday to the Benton County Courthouse Annex in Bentonville. Lobaton, who struck and killed a bicyclist in Siloam Springs, then fled to Mexico, pleaded guilty to manslaughter.



INDEX

THE MORNING NEWS

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Business	Section D	Nation & World	Section B
Classifieds	Section F	Region & State	7A
Comics	6-7E	Sports	Section C
Crossword	5E	Your Home	Section E

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