

PARKWAY PROGRESS

A Newsletter Reporting on the Campus Parkway Alignment Study

County Holds First Public Meeting for Campus Parkway

More than 150 home owners, business owners, farmers, and other residents turned out to learn about and express opinions on the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Project at the first public meeting on the project, held March 18, 1999.

Merced County Department of Public Works staff shared with the public the

goals and objectives of the project, potential alignments, and a description of the process for determining a preferred alignment.

Attendees examined large maps displaying the preliminary alignments and spoke with staff one-on-one. County staff also presented land use and environmental factors they



will use to select candidate alignments for further evaluation.



This photo and the one above, at right, were taken at the March 18 meeting for the project. The next public meeting is tentatively scheduled for June 30.

County staff, the consulting team, and representatives from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) also answered questions from the audience and provided supplemental information.

Community input received through this meeting will assist in developing alternatives for the Parkway Study. (See page three- *Public Identifies Alignment Concerns and Issue Areas for Parkway Study.*)

Why is the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Study Needed?

The purpose of the Campus Parkway project is to improve future transportation in the Merced region.

Specifically, the Parkway is intended to serve future growth in northern Merced, the eastern industrial area of Merced, and the University Community, including the UC Merced campus.

Additionally, the project will provide an important corridor for transit, utilities, and bicycle travel.

The Department of Public Works is conducting the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Study to help determine the best alignment for the Parkway.

County staff hopes to minimize impacts of the

Parkway as much as possible by listening to the concerns of the public and incorporating that information into the criteria used for considering the alignments.

The public meetings offer staff a valuable opportunity to gather public comment for this purpose. The public meeting on March 18 was the first in a series planned by the County.

Public Identifies Alignment Concerns and Issue Areas for Parkway Study

Impacts to agriculture and homes topped the concerns articulated by local citizens at the first public meeting for the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Study.

In addition, participants expressed concerns about growth, accessibility, environmental impacts, and specific alignment alternatives.

Concern for agriculture in the project area generated numerous comments. Some residents speculated that the Parkway, specifically the easternmost alignments, could increase growth and reduce agricultural land and urged protection of farmland in the area. Citizens and landowners stated that the ability of farm equipment to access orchards and fields is critical to farmers and should be considered in the design of the roadway.

Attendees were also deeply concerned about the impact of alignment alternatives on residences. While there was agreement that the preferred alignment should minimize impacts to existing residences, property owners had varying opinions about which alignment would do so most effectively.

Several citizens suggested limiting access to the roadway as a means of increasing safety.

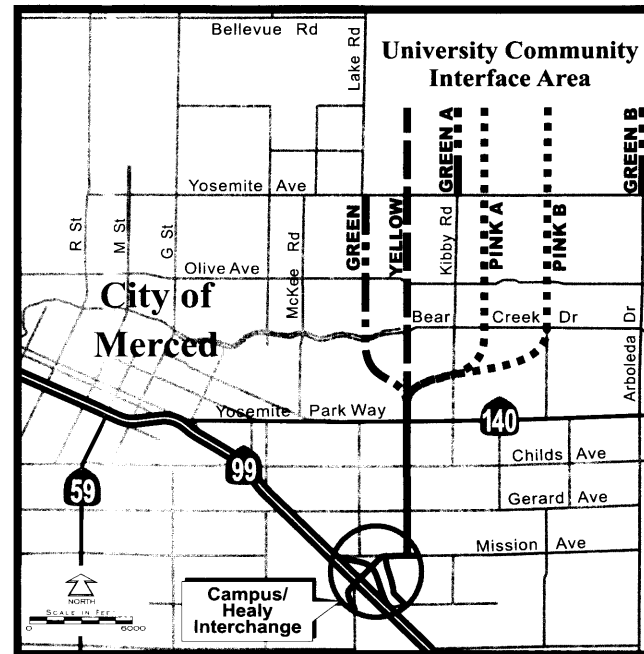
Numerous residents rated accessibility to the City of Merced as a top area of concern.

Several citizens recommended alignment alternatives outside of the specified Study Area for the Campus Parkway Route Alignment, specifically one northwest of the current Study Area. Participants frequently mentioned preservation

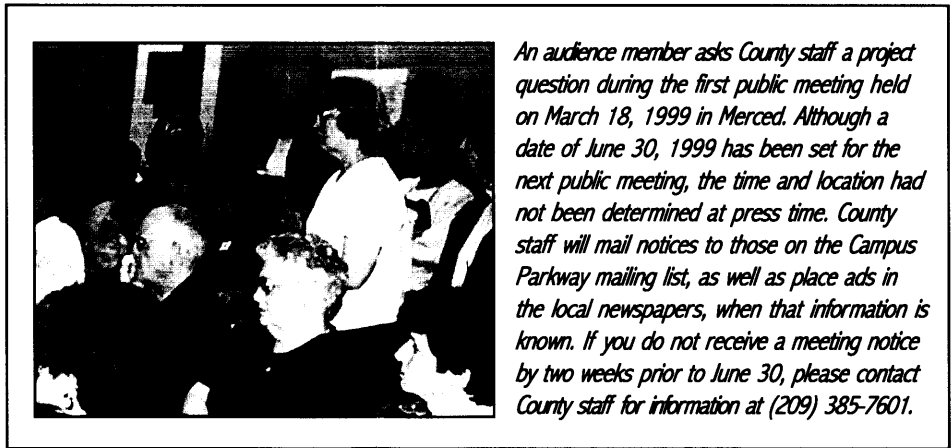
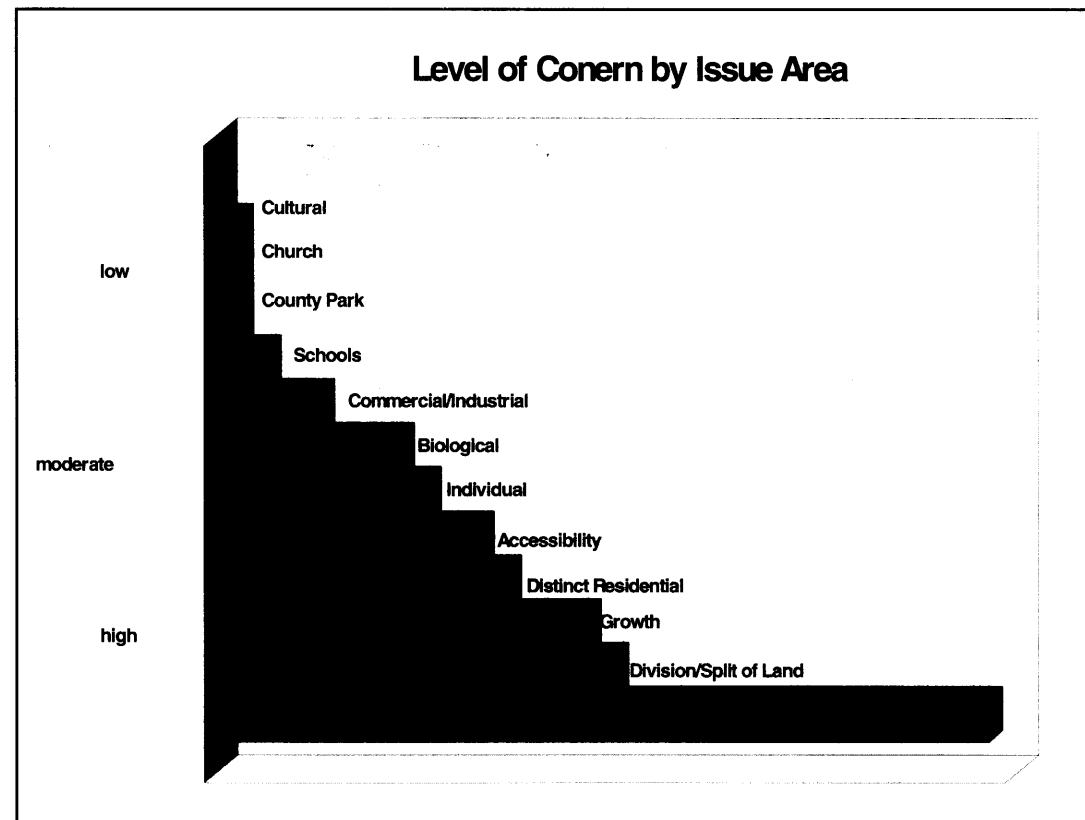
of agricultural land as a reason to support a northern option over the current study area. (See story right- *Regional Planning Calls for Transportation Loop System.*)

The figure at left summarizes the results of a survey handed out at the first public meeting regarding the level of concern over specific issue areas. While the survey does not represent a scientific study, the figure illustrates the degree to which written respondents expressed concern over different issues related to determining an alignment.

Public Works staff will carefully consider all concerns expressed by the public, both in person and in writing, as they continue the study. Staff encourages members of the public to attend the next public meeting and contact them directly with concerns.



This map illustrates the alignments presented at the first public meeting. County staff distributed color maps of these alternatives at that meeting. Both the map distributed during the public meeting and the map above show only the general areas of the proposed alignments. More specific details on locations will develop as the study evolves.



An audience member asks County staff a project question during the first public meeting held on March 18, 1999 in Merced. Although a date of June 30, 1999 has been set for the next public meeting, the time and location had not been determined at press time. County staff will mail notices to those on the Campus Parkway mailing list, as well as place ads in the local newspapers, when that information is known. If you do not receive a meeting notice by two weeks prior to June 30, please contact County staff for information at (209) 385-7601.

**DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?
NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?**

**Contact Project Engineer Steve Rough at (209) 385-7601,
or by email at: jser@co.merced.ca.us**

**or visit our web site at a NEW address:
www.campusparkway.com**

Regional Planning Calls for Transportation Loop System

Could a "northern" alignment be a part of the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Study?

Many attendees at the March 18 public meeting asked if another road, to the north of Merced, could be built instead of the potential alignments in the proposed study area.

Region-wide transportation plans actually call for such a road, but as an addition to the planned Campus Parkway project, rather than as an alternative to it. Intensive study by local, state, and federal transportation planning agencies, as well as information derived from the public through those study processes, resulted in that recommendation, as part of a the UC Campus Parkway Loop System.

In 1996, planners for the regional transportation-planning agency for Merced County, Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG), began the State Highway 99 Major Investment Study (MIS). The MIS addressed how to accommodate the future capacity needs of the highway, which will be essential to the economic health of the Merced/Atwater region in the future.

The purpose of the MIS for Highway 99 was to identify improvements needed to local roadways in order to improve transportation, stimulate local economy, and improve the competitiveness of the region

for attracting private and public sector investments while preserving and protecting the environment of the region. Members of the public worked with business and industry in Merced County Farm Bureau, the cities of Atwater and Merced, and the County of Merced on a steering committee for that study. Steering committee representatives carefully studied the factors involved and presented alternatives and recommendations for State Highway 99.

As a result of the MIS study, both eastern and a western roadways were recommended that would connect to the University Community area, in effect creating a "loop" around the City of Merced and two access areas for the new campus, called the UC Campus Parkway Loop System. The eastern portion would be located within the vicinity of the current Study Area for the Campus Parkway Alignment. The western portion would be built to the west of the City, heading northeast from Highway 99, toward the University Community. This western access, referred to as the Highway 59 Expressway, is the equivalent to the "northern" route that many attendees at the first public meeting for the Campus Parkway Route Alignment Study inquired about.

MCAG incorporated these
SEE PAGE FOUR, REGIONAL



REGIONAL

recommendations into the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) planning process. The RTP outlines transportation priorities for the entire county over the next 20 years. Each county must have an RTP and update it periodically, and each project must be listed in the RTP before it can receive funding.

MCAG updated the RTP in 1998. Public input on the RTP, through public workshops and during public meetings of the MCAG Governing Board, played an important role in development

of the RTP before MCAG staff submitted it to the Governing Board for approval. A representative from each of the cities in the county, as well as County Supervisors, sit on the Board and participated in the final approval of the RTP and the ranking of the projects included.

Projects related to the UC Campus Parkway Loop System ranked high on the priority lists for the update. The Campus Parkway project and the western, Highway 59 Expressway, appeared as top priorities for the County in the update. Of these two, the Campus

Parkway received the higher priority ranking.

A careful regional transportation planning process, including intense public involvement has resulted in the Campus Parkway project being a top priority for the region. At the same time, the alternative route suggested by the public at the first public meeting for the Parkway project has also been identified as necessary in the future, as funding permits. Any work for this western portion of the "loop" system, including the Highway 59 Expressway, will consist of a separate environmental process and the route will not be a part of the studies being conducted for the Campus Parkway.

**WATCH YOUR MAILBOX AND THE
NEWSPAPER FOR INFORMATION
ON THE JUNE 30TH PUBLIC MEETING!**

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