

BRIEFING STATEMENT

Great Smoky Mountains National Park Completion of the Foothills Parkway March 2009

BACKGROUND:

Congress authorized the Foothills Parkway as a scenic parkway on February 22, 1944 (Public Law 232). The stated purpose of the Parkway is to provide beautiful vistas of the Great Smoky Mountains along their northern flank (TN) and to disperse traffic in the area. The entire 72-mile corridor is administered by Great Smoky Mountains National Park. To date, two discontinuous segments totaling 22.5 miles are completed and open. The Parkway parallels the Park's northern boundary from Chilhowee Lake, TN (Section 8H) to I-40 near Cosby, TN (Section 8A).

Between 1966 and 1970, a 6.4-mile section of road between U.S. Highway 321 in Walland and Carr Creek (Section 8F), was constructed. In the 1980s, two contracts were awarded for construction of approximately 10 miles of road (Section 8E). Both projects experienced structural fill failures and erosion problems that caused the projects to be suspended in 1989, thus leaving a 1.65-mile segment uncompleted around Caylor Gap which is referred to as the "missing link." In the 1990s, a new design was developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete the "missing link" using bridges, walls, and fills to minimize surface disturbance and environmental impacts.

CURRENT STATUS:

Since early 2000, the National Park Service (NPS) and FHWA have worked together to develop a plan to complete the "missing link." Three bridges, designated as bridges 8, 9 and 10 and two road segments, all located on the west end of the "missing link," have been completed for \$20.9 million.

In October 2008, a contract for \$3.7 million was awarded for a 1,200-foot long segment of road on the eastern end of the "missing link." The project is scheduled to be complete by May 2009.

Funding is available from a combination of SAFETEA-LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy of Users) and Park Roads and Parkways Category II funding to begin work on a section of roadway in the vicinity of Caylor Gap. This section is approximately 1,800 feet long and is located east of Bridge 8. This project is currently in design and should get underway in late 2009.

Preliminary information from FHWA indicates that completion of the "missing link" could be constructed and paved by 2016, the Centennial of the National Park Service, using a very aggressive schedule. Full completion of Section 8E and 8 F from Walland to Wears Valley is estimated to cost \$118 million, not including funding currently available or expected.

Once the Walland to Wears Valley sections are constructed and paved, three unfinished segments, totalling 33.5 miles between Wears Valley and Cosby, would remain. The estimated cost of their completion is \$264 million. Their status is as follows:

Section 8B – In 1999, an Environmental Report for this 14-mile section of parkway was completed. The project was restarted again 2007 to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). However, due to uncertainty about when construction could begin, it became likely that the environmental compliance would need to be redone by the time funding became available, so the EIS project was suspended. The total cost for Section 8B was preliminarily estimated at \$107 million.

Section 8C and 8D – No planning work has been done for Section 8C. A draft EIS was completed in 1995 for Section 8D, but due to lack of funding the project was suspended. Section 8C and 8D are roughly estimated to cost \$57 million and \$100 million respectively.

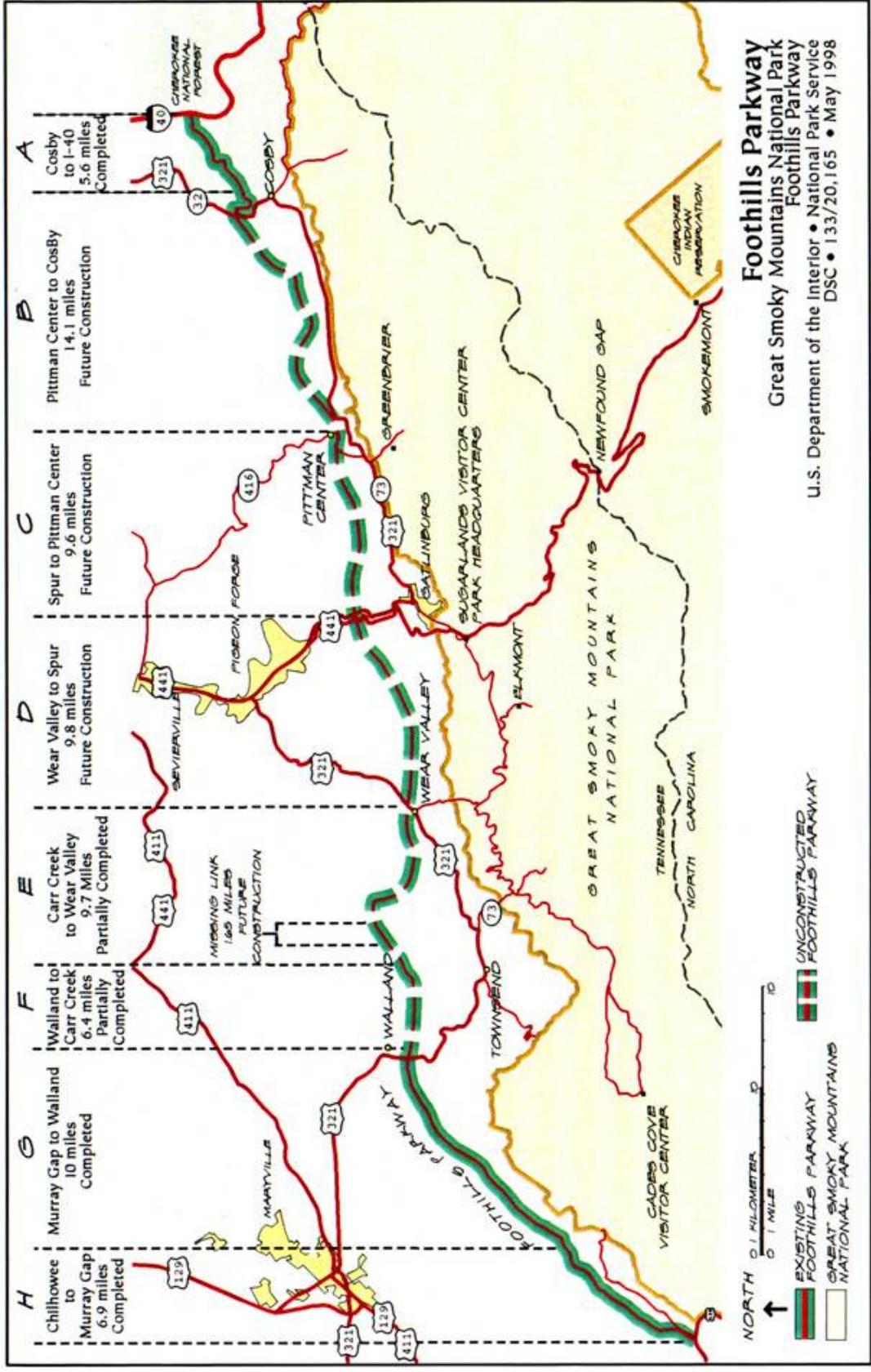
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE POSITION:

The NPS supports completion of Section 8E and 8F as its top priority on the Foothills Parkway. Completion of the Section 8E and 8F (including the “missing link”) would open another 16 miles of parkway to visitors.

POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES:

Leadership of neighboring Tennessee communities and the Tennessee Congressional delegation support completion of the Parkway.

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