

Hourglass: New route shows mobility authority is listening to us

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The challenge sounds something like a term project for highway engineering students: Given a map of East Texas and the location of oil wells, figure out a way to build a highway without hitting wells and affecting as few personal residences as possible.

It's the kind of thing that might make the student want to just give up and go become an English major.

But that was the mission of the North East Texas Regional Mobility Authority after a meeting a few months ago in Clarksville City in which citizens said the plans for an "hourglass" highway that will tie Tyler to Longview and Marshall plowed right through the East Texas oilfield.

Of course, citizens objected to that for obvious reasons, and never has the term "back to the drawing board" been more appropriate.

Throughout the entire planning of the hourglass project, NETRMA officials have promised to listen to concerns of residents, industries and any others. Sometimes, however, when such promises are made by quasi-government agencies they best not be taken to the bank.

Not so with NETRMA. When officials came back earlier this month with a new route for the hourglass, it avoided the oilfield, which made a lot of people breathe easier.

Details remain to be worked out and the latest iteration of the map will almost certainly not be the last; there are miles to go in this process before it is put to bed.

But it is good for all of us to know, first, that the mobility authority is going to listen and respond to our concerns and, secondly, that officials are being transparent and truthful with the public in trying to get the best possible route for all.

Even so, not everyone will be happy with the course and there simply is no way that everyone can be pleased in this process.

What we hope all of us can remember is that the hourglass project will be a huge economic boon for our area. Transportation is an essential key to growth and the fact this project will link three of the most important cities in Northeast Texas is a drawing card for all kinds of business and industry. And it will open new territory to development as it makes transportation easier, faster and safer.

If you still have problems with the route you should speak up before it is finalized. Perhaps it can be changed. But even if it cannot you will know you were heard and that your voice counts. That's exactly the way the system should work.