Inner Loop won't happen
Projected costs lead officials to ditch plans for bypass

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BOALSBURG -- Municipal leaders around Penn State acted Monday to kill plans for the Eastern Inner Loop and instead look for a cheaper way for road traffic to bypass downtown State College.

"The majority of people seem to feel that $40 million is just not going to make it," said Tom Daubert, State College Borough Council president.

The Eastern Inner Loop was a studied but not yet designed road that, when planning ceased four years ago, would have extended University Drive at Curtin Road to connect with North Atherton Street at Vairo Boulevard.

Most of the construction would have been on Penn State-owned land in College Township. The objective was to ease congestion on Park Avenue and North Atherton Street.

The road would have passed through Penn State's 395-acre arboretum.

But construction costs -- projected between $30 million and $45 million -- led elected officials to consider the project unrealistic.

One possible alternative, a partial interchange between Fox Hollow Road and the Mount Nittany Expressway, is thought by the state Department of Transportation to be too close to Interstate 99's Park Avenue interchange.

The vote by the Centre Region Council of Governments general forum -- elected
supervisors and council members from the six municipalities around Penn State -- was 17-5.

One dissenter, Ferguson Township Supervisor George Pytel, warned that construction costs will go up and that the need for the road won't go away.

"If you don't get it," Pytel said, "years from now you're going to be in real sad shape."

Also Monday, the general forum retreated from regionalism to urge a conservation group to take a land-preservation funding request to the individual municipalities instead of the umbrella COG organization.

The six municipalities -- State College and College, Ferguson, Halfmoon, Harris and Patton townships -- were divided over ClearWater Conservancy's request for $300,000 toward a projected $2.2 million price for 423 acres of land on Tussey Mountain in Ferguson Township.

The land, called the Musser Gap, is owned by a developer who has plans to build large-lot single-family homes near the top of the ridge. But the conservancy is trying to buy out the developer and make the land part of Rothrock State Forest.

Ferguson and Harris townships, which include parts of Tussey Mountain, supported funding a COG contribution of $300,000 with municipal shares based on the COG's population-based formula and have included their shares in 2006 budgets.

But Patton Township supervisors voted 3-2 this month not to contribute to the land purchase, College Township has not budgeted its full share, State College posed some questions ahead of a decision, and Halfmoon Township is undecided.

"There is no consensus of one way to do it," said Charles Graham, Harris Township supervisor and chairman of COG's finance committee.

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