



MURRAY LEDGER & TIMES

Bridge forum draws crowd

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CADIZ, Ky. - Kathryn Harper figures she drives Lawrence Memorial Bridge over Lake Barkley more than just about anyone. The Trigg County resident works at Land Between the Lakes and makes the trek over the 75-year-old bridge twice a day on her way to and from work.

Harper was one of about 300 concerned citizens from all over western Kentucky who packed the Lake Barkley State Resort Park Convention Center Thursday afternoon to hear state transportation officials present plans for two new bridges that will span Kentucky and Barkley Lakes.

The new bridges will replace Lawrence Memorial and its twin, Eggner's Ferry Bridge over Kentucky Lake. They'll lie just to the north of the existing bridges and will be almost five times as wide. Instead of two, 10-foot lanes and no shoulder, the new bridges will have four 12-foot lanes, 12-foot shoulders on both lake sides, 6-foot shoulders in the center and a 12-foot sidewalk and bike path.



TOMMY DILLARD/Ledger & Times

Joe and Daryleen Noble of Cadiz rate one of the proposed bridges using their electronic keypad at a public meeting held at Lake Barkley State Resort Park Thursday evening. Residents were allowed to voice their opinions on 24 different proposals for bridges to replace the current U.S. 68 bridges over Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley.

The increased width will eliminate mirror-to-mirror collisions that were common on the current bridges.

Nearly all of the assembled citizens raised their hands when asked by project manager J.B. Williams whether they thought the old bridges needed to be replaced. The chief purpose of the meeting was to gauge public opinion on which bridge styles were most aesthetically pleasing to residents of the lakes area.

The new bridges will replace the current U.S. 68 bridges, both of which were constructed in 1932 and deemed "functionally obsolete" in recent maintenance inspection reports.

The meeting was the first of four public input meetings state transportation officials will hold in the region over the course of the next year. The project is still in the "Preliminary Concepts" stage and citizens made their opinions known on 24 bridge design types through an electronic polling process.

The transportation cabinet will consider many criteria when selecting new bridge styles including what the public wants, what is easily constructable, easily maintained and what the costs are for each option, Williams said.

"What we are trying to do is choose a bridge that is, first of all, buildable and fundable," he told the crowd. "But we want it to be one that you all would prefer, since you're going to be living with it for several generations to come. You should have input on it."

The old bridges will be left standing until the new bridges are complete and in use, Williams said.

For complete story, see today's Ledger & Times