

Courtesy of THE CYPRUS MAIL Monday, November 26, 2007

Lania residents stage protest over new road's location.

A RECENTLY formed lobby group concerned over the environmental impact of a new motorway stages a protest on Sunday, with a convoy of cars driving down the existing Limassol-Platres road waving black flags.

The Committee for the Protection of the Kourri-Xylorikou Valley were expressing their opposition to the proposed four-lane Limassol-Saittas motorway.

“We will not stand by and let our community get destroyed by technocrats who refuse to review their plans.

“We will keep on fighting as long as it takes,” said Loizos Koilonis, member of the Committee on the Protection of the Environment of the Kourri-Xylorikou Valley.

Approximately 70 cars participated in the convoy, including villagers and the many British families who have made Lania their home. Also at the event were MPs Marinos Sizopoulos, Christos Pourgourides and Angelos Votsis, European Party President Demetris Syllouris, as well as representatives of the Federation of Environmental Organisations and the Cyprus Green Party.

“When expanding road networks, we should strive to improve existing roads instead of constructing more huge motorways.

“In this case, the road will only speed up the journey to Limassol by two to three minutes and will create much greater gas emissions, as well as more deaths by traffic accidents,” said Pantelis Metaxas of the Federation of Environmental Organisations.

The majority of Lania Council re-iterated their opposition to the motorway passing so close to their village. Existing plans foresee that the road will pass 200 metres from the village, through green fields, on land designated for vineyard cultivation.

The Committee is not asking to do away with the road construction altogether, but to locate the road a bit further away from their community. This would reduce noise pollution, car emissions contaminating the vineyards and the village air, as well as the alteration of the view and the natural landscape.

“The Council’s main arguments against the road are that the resulting noise pollution will undermine efforts to promote Lania as a quiet agrotourism destination, and will also devastate agricultural development as it will cause air pollution,” said Giorgos Ktistis, Lania Council member.

A report by independent consultants, Ioakim and Loizas, supports the views by the committee. The report refers to the objectives for sustainable tourism and vineries in Lania, arguing that these will be undermined by the construction of the road so close to the village.

“Considering that the vineyards and the natural landscape are the basis for the achievement of these targets, we believe that the present positioning of the road will be destructive. Therefore, we believe the road should be moved away from the core of the village, to avoid serious environmental damage, particularly noise pollution,” the report continues.

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To enable the road being located further west from the village (in essence behind the mountain facing Lania) the committee has suggested that a 300-metre tunnel passing through the mountain is constructed.

According to the group, government officials have told them that this tunnel will cost £15 million, which is a price the government is not willing to pay. The committee, however, questions this quoted sum, arguing it is actually much lower, and that government officials have no evidence to back up the quoted price.

“As an engineer, I accept the value of technocratic views, but would like to clarify that price should not be the only consideration. We should also consider the environmental impact of the project's location,” said Demetris Syllouris, President European Party (EVROKO).

Some of Lania residents have also suggested that there is a secret agenda behind the government's insistence to place the road at its present proposed location. Unsurprisingly, this hidden agenda scenario involves developer interests and golf course construction.

“Right next to the road at Alassa, a company called Alpha Panareti Golf Investments is planning to construct a golf course. They have already began drilling the ground for water. Imagine! We don't have enough water to drink and they are drilling holes to find water for golf courses!” said one of the protesters.

MPs Christos Pourgourides and Angelos Votsis invited the majority of Lania Council to their offices to discuss the issue and gather information on the subject. MP Marinou Sizoopoulos expressed his support to those who oppose the proposed location of the road, adding that Lania Council's suggestion for a tunnel cutting through the mountain should be followed.

The issue will be discussed at the Environment Service offices on December 10, where a review of the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) will take place. The Environment Service has the authority to block the project if it finds that the EIA indicates serious environmental impacts will arise as a result of the project.

The other side: some communities support road

PRESENTING THE other side of the road debate, communities further up from Lania are expressing their support for the planned project, citing advantages including easy access to city amenities, which will combat the phenomenon of people abandoning rural communities due to lack of prospects and services.

“The proposed road will reduce journey time to Limassol by almost 20 minutes. Countryside residents will be better served, fuel will be saved, tourist visits encouraged and the isolated countryside will be liberated,” said Savvas Savva, president of the Union of Cyprus Communities, representing the Kourri-Xylorikou communities.

The proposed road will be passing directly through Trymiklini village, but its residents are welcoming the road, arguing it will offer common benefits to the majority of village residents. “We support the road and want its construction to start right away,” said Trymiklini Community Council President Andreas Orphanos.

Talking to the Cyprus Mail, Orphanos argued that if the road is not completed as soon as possible, many village communities will die out.

“Here in Trymiklini we are doing fine, but villages further up are dying. Prodromos, Fini and Kaminaria villages are getting smaller day by day. The only thing going on up there are funerals—no weddings no christenings. Time is running out,” he said.

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Orphanos also explained how the road will cater to the rural residents' everyday needs, allowing them to stay in their village instead of moving to the city.

"Children who wish to go to university, for example, must take afternoon lessons to prepare for the exams. We do not have teachers offering afternoon lessons in all subjects in the village. So, we have to go to the city to do it, and if the road is there, we have easy access to that service," he added.

Trymiklini also plans to use the new road to its advantage and transform the village to a tourist stopover centre.

"We are considering projects that will take place after the road is built that will transform our village to a first-class tourist stopover. People going to the mountains can stop at Lania buy fruit from our market, visit our Church and then continue with their journey," Orphanos explained.

"We must all think of the common benefit. The road has to pass from somewhere, some will benefit more, some will bear more costs. But it is something that must be done," he continued.