

Boosters see no humor in 'Crawleigh' moniker DOT will scale back use of nickname from contest

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By: Josh Shaffer

RALEIGH Boston survived the Big Dig. Los Angeles endured Carmageddon. But Raleigh will have no Crawleigh to joke about through its own traffic doldrums - at least not out loud.

The state Department of Transportation has agreed to scale back the humorous nickname awarded to the massive, three-year overhaul of Raleigh's southern Beltline, heeding concerns that the light-hearted handle lent the region a bad name.

Like the traffic snarl to come, DOT's response is stop-and-go: catering to worries about tourism while also honoring the 4,700-plus people who entered Raleigh's name-that-gridlock contest. They're not dropping Crawleigh, but they're not trumpeting it, either.

"We feel like we came up with a good happy medium," said Greer Beaty, DOT spokeswoman. "We will not brand the community."

Next summer, road crews will start tearing out and replacing Interstates 40 and 440 between U.S. 1/64 in the west and U.S. 64/264 in the east, squeezing the mostly eight-lane highway to two lanes in each direction.

To lessen the pain, DOT sought an informal moniker for the project, no profanity allowed.

More than 2,300 people picked Crawleigh in an online poll held in August, easily beating out "Southern Discomfort" and "Carmuda Triangle." Top honors went to Grant Tew of Raleigh, first to submit the name.

"I think I've crawled through enough traffic snarls to know what one looks like," said Tew at the time. "So Crawleigh seemed like a good name."

Dimming enthusiasm

At first, Crawleigh met with fanfare.

"It's here!" read the title of a DOT press release sent by spokeswoman Leah Friedman in August. "The name 'I-40/440 Rebuild Project' will no longer be uttered."

The minutes from the September Board of Transportation meeting seemed to echo the excitement. "The Department will be looking for creative ways to incorporate this name into the communications about this important project."

But some of Raleigh's biggest boosters worried the image of a lagging, slow-moving city might stick, among them the Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Regional Transportation Alliance and Raleigh Economic Development.

"We just thought it really isn't the brand we wanted for the area," said Dennis Edwards, CEO of the Raleigh CVB.

"Big Dig, Carmageddon ... using those names doesn't refer to the city. But 'Crawleigh' could easily be translated into 'Raleigh.' "

Part of the problem with Crawleigh is it didn't tell anyone what construction is happening where, said Joe Milazzo, executive director of Regional Transportation Alliance. Something like "I-440 Rebuild" would describe and locate the pain while pointing to the future.

By this week, official enthusiasm for Crawleigh had dimmed.

"You never heard me say that word," DOT district engineer Wally Bowman told a business crowd during a meeting in Raleigh Tuesday.

"It does have a negative connotation for tourism. ... We will call it the I-40 Reconstruction Project."

'Still out there'

Friedman, the DOT spokeswoman who whittled 370 suggestions down to five finalists while organizing the naming poll, said the goal of Crawleigh was to get people talking about the looming construction. The point, she said, was to get people thinking about alternate routes before the slowdown starts.

As for the name, she wouldn't say yes or no about whether it's being officially dropped. As of Wednesday, Crawleigh still appeared on the DOT website.

"The name is still out there," she said. "We held this contest. Folks voted on it."

Beaty stressed that DOT has heard the business community's concerns.

"We don't have a fancy Web page," she said. "There's no branding. There's no logo."

And for a commuter fighting through the congestion, there's no easy curse. I-40 Reconstruction Project doesn't roll as easily off the tongue.