

TDOT Public Meeting

INFORMATION REGARDING TDOT PUBLIC MEETING OCT. 25, 2007, ON PURPOSE AND NEED AND ALTERNATIVES

At the Oct. 25, 2007 meeting TDOT presented the 'Purpose and Need' for the PPE as well as 'initial alternatives.' The public had opportunities to comment on the Purpose and Need and the alternatives.

Background

In July 2006, CAPPE Board members met with TDOT staff at the Knoxville TDOT headquarters. At that meeting CAPPE urged TDOT to share the 'Purpose and Need' statement with the public *before* seeking public input on alternatives. How could the public assess alternatives when the Purpose and Need were not known? The upcoming Oct. 25 public meeting combines Purpose and Need with Alternatives. By putting these two components into one meeting, the public is being asked to consider alternatives without being given adequate time to evaluate the Purpose and Need.

New Developments

TDOT has changed the description of the project purpose. The original rationale for the PPE was to provide four-lane access to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This need no longer exists, but instead of acknowledging that this project is no longer needed, we see TDOT offering new 'needs':

- Lack of a northwest/east connection east of Alcoa and Maryville to help serve:
 - Expanding residential development occurring in eastern Alcoa and Maryville and northern Blount County; and
 - Increasing demand for trips between Maryville and Alcoa and the Knoxville area to the north.

- An incomplete regional roadway (Pellissippi Parkway (SR 162) between I-40 and US 321) that has been a part of the regional transportation planning efforts since the late 1970s.
- Traffic congestion and poor levels of service on the major arterial roads in the study area (US 129, SR 33, US 411 and US 321);
- High crash incidents in the Maryville core that through travelers between the northwestern and eastern portions of the county must pass.

CAPPE'S response

The PPE will accelerate residential development in the area, imposing further strains on the County budget and already inadequate infrastructure (roads and schools). There is no plan to improve the existing road system to which the PPE will add traffic.

The Blount County Policies Plan does not contain a vision of becoming a bedroom community for Knoxville and Oak Ridge. The Policies Plan does contain a commitment to maintaining the rural character of the County.

Transportation planning ideas from 30+ years ago have been replaced by new approaches that will better serve our community. Transportation planners around the country have learned from the outdated ideas of the past – let's learn from them.

TDOT's own studies showed little improvement in Level of Service (LOS) on major arterial roads if the PPE were built. This is a classic example of referring to a symptom to justify an action rather than addressing the cause. TDOT should address the factors that cause high crash incidents, not seek a way to by-pass them. Also the PPE would increase

the likelihood of crash incidents, injury, and fatality by adding traffic to US 411, a substandard 2-lane road with no shoulders and poor sightlines.

We are asking to see the traffic studies and analysis TDOT relied upon as the basis for determining these ‘needs’.

TDOT has also offered revised objectives:

The core transportation objectives of the proposed action are:

- Enhance regional transportation system linkages;
- Improve circumferential mobility by providing travel options to the existing radial roadway network in Blount County, Maryville, and Alcoa;
- Achieve acceptable traffic flows (level of service) on the local transportation network; and
- Improve roadway safety on the existing roadway network, including the Maryville core.

CAPPE'S response

We agree that safety is a primary objective. We disagree that increasing traffic on US 411 and delivering traffic onto US 321 will improve safety in the Maryville core. We agree that acceptable traffic flows (level of service) is an objective. We disagree that the PPE would improve traffic flows on SR 33, which needs two major improvements: a center turn lane and reconfiguration of the Lincoln Rd./SR 33-Broadway/Wildwood Road intersection. (See proposed designs.)

TDOT further says Secondary objectives of the proposed action include:

- Support community and growth management goals;
- Minimize adverse impacts to neighborhoods and businesses;
- Minimize adverse impacts to farmlands; and
- Minimize adverse impacts to the natural and cultural environment

CAPPE'S response

The PPE will ensure the opposite of these ‘secondary’ objectives. As indicated above, the Blount County Policies Plan expresses a commitment to maintain the rural character of the county. The accelerated growth that would follow the extension of the PPE, and the demand for services, are contrary to the community’s current needs and growth management goals.

Alternatives

TDOT has proposed five alternatives for evaluation in the EIS: (1) No-Build; (2) Transportation System Management (TSM) activities; (3) Transit; (4) Upgrade existing roadways in the northeastern part of Blount County; and (5) a new four-lane roadway on new location.

CAPPE'S response

Alternative (1) is preferred, as there are other higher priorities for transportation improvements in our county. The Alcoa By-Pass will do much more to address safety and Level of Service, as will the Montvale Road improvements.

Alternative (4) - Upgrade existing roadways in the northeastern part of Blount County is consistent with the Wilbur Smith Associates study that was done for Blount County some

years ago. The two major highways in the area (SR 33 and US 411), if improved, would contribute a great deal to improved traffic flow and safety. Our Highway Superintendent Bill Dunlap has identified other roads (for example, Ellejoy) in need of safety improvements that qualify for federal funds.

Additional comments

- Traffic problems in Maryville around Montvale and Morganton Roads, the 129 bypass, the old and the new Wal-Marts and other roads where the County has been experiencing most of its growth (and accidents) will not be relieved by 4.5 miles of interstate highway in the northeastern part of Blount County.
- Traffic congestion on SR 33 (Broadway) at the current terminus of the PPE will not be relieved by the proposed extension of the PP. The on- and off-ramps for SR 162 at SR 33 do need to be reconfigured and integrated into the access road entrance to the new R&D Park, along with Alcoa Trail, which serves the Clayton headquarters, and the entrance to Jackson Hills. Traffic lights at SR 33/Sam Houston Schoolhouse Road and the integrated entrance to the R&D Park would help with the flow of traffic at different times of day.
- SR 33 (Broadway) will continue to be a slow route anywhere east or west until a center turn lane is created. Without a center turn lane, all traffic has to wait for any single driver wishing to turn across oncoming traffic.
- The Wildwood Road/Broadway/Lincoln intersection is another bottleneck that will not be resolved by extending the PPE. This intersection can be redesigned to improve traffic flow and safety.
- The campus-like atmosphere of the Research & Development Park at the Jackson Farm will be disrupted by building an interstate highway through it.
- The proposed PPE was projected to have an interchange at Sevierville Road (US 411) and another at US 321. Sevierville Road is a narrow 2-lane road with no shoulders. Adding traffic bound for the PPE to this substandard federal highway is inviting injury and fatalities.
- In 2004, the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization projected a total cost for the PPE extension at approximately \$22,900,000. A later estimate was \$37.4 million. In its current planning documents, the TPO projects the Right of Way phase alone will cost over \$11 million – and this is before any construction is done. Let's use our limited highway funds for projects like the Alcoa Highway By-pass that will ensure safety for many, not for a project that will exacerbate our transportation problems.

Send your comments to the address below and please send a copy to CAPPE at PO Box 494, Alcoa, TN 37701.

Project Comments

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