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Residents have reservations at first workshop on Knoxville Regional Parkway

By **ANN HINCH**, Special to the News Sentinel
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LENOIR CITY - Heading home from Knox County, Lenoir City resident Pete Studer takes care with traffic merging onto westbound Interstates 40/75 from Watt Road.

"There's traffic that has to fight toward 75 now from that ramp," he pointed out Monday, fishtailing his hand to illustrate crossing lanes. "You're going to get traffic that will have to fight to get over there for 40, too."

That's if the 36-mile Knoxville Regional Parkway is built as proposed, including a planned southward shift of I-40 in Loudon County. The project, to be designated State Route 475, would link I-75 in Loudon County with I-75 in Anderson County near Wolf Valley Road.

Studer was one of about 80 residents who attended a workshop at Eaton Elementary School in Loudon County to study the plan. Three more workshops on the proposed loop around downtown Knoxville are scheduled.

"With the preferred alignment itself, we have very little impact to existing (noninterstate) roads," said engineer Norm Johnson with Gresham, Smith & Partners.

TDOT would need 185 acres in Loudon County for rights of way, displacing three houses and the Hindu Community Center, according to Palmer Engineering Vice President David Lindeman. Seeking easements might begin in 2008.

"I'm against the Orange Route, and I'll always be against it," said Knox County resident Dave Craig, although he praised the citizen Design Resource Team that plotted the current proposed route, which removes a cloverleaf and possible businesses from near his home. "They've done the best they could with what they had."

Lenoir City resident Pat Hunter worried a better road will bring more traffic and, with it, worse air pollution. Travis Brickey, with TDOT community relations, said much of the other feedback he's getting is "when, when, when?"

"They're sort of in a limbo," he said of those living near the proposed route. "Do they sell, or build, or invest (in land)?"

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