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## Venable: Either way, we're really gonna pay

By **SAM VENABLE**, [venob@knews.com](mailto:venob@knews.com)  
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**SAM  
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Right up front, two disclosures:

1. I live in the Hardin Valley area. Not in the path of the proposed new highway, but close enough to be affected.
2. I operate a motor vehicle on Knoxville streets and have for more than 40 years.

That being said, let me ask an irate question that falls under the category of Taking Leave of Our Senses:

Why in the world have we allowed state government to start the process of building a mega-million-dollar thoroughfare that'll be outdated before it is finished, and city government to subcontract its official police duties?

The highway, of course, is the "Knoxville Regional Parkway" or "Orange Route" or "Knoxville Beltway" or "Route 475" or whatever name you wish to apply to this 26.5-mile waste of asphalt scheduled to cleave Hardin Valley one of these decades.

It's a given that nobody wants a (name your poison: highway, landfill, strip mall) in their back yard. It's also a given that Knoxville could use some bypass relief from out-of-town travelers who simply want to go north or south, not stay in our midst.

(Naturally, the biggest traffic obstruction in recent history is highway construction itself. Once that mess around Papermill Drive is finished, look for better flow all around. But why trifle with details?)

Knoxville has a history of Band-Aid traffic fixes. Interstate 640 comes immediately to mind. All it did was move Malfunction Junction a few miles west.

This time, planners had the chance to design a true bypass well away from civilization: the so-called "Blue Route" through Roane County. But the idea was nixed - much to the delight of real estate speculators drooling at the thought of McSuburbs in every square inch of West Knox County - as being "too expensive."

Huh? Even before one acre has been acquired for this new road, the officially quoted price tag is \$500-\$600 million. By the time grading begins, you can double that. If and when the ribbon gets cut, heaven only knows how much we will have shelled out.

Then - you know this as well as I - as soon as the project is finished, highway officials will suddenly realize how crowded it is. They'll shake the dust off those old Blue Route plans and start over.

While you're mulling these millions-upon-millions, consider how much money Knoxville stands to make by farming out its traffic light enforcement to a private company.

The city recently inked a deal with an outfit called Redflex Traffic Systems to monitor lights at nine (at this point, anyway) intersections. Motorists filmed running through a red will be billed for \$50, which then will be divided with the city.

In theory, this is supposed to cut down on "T-bone" collisions at intersections. But my guess is it's also going to drastically increase the number of rear-enders as would-be red light squeakers jam on their brakes abruptly. Not to mention pad the city's bottom line.

Meanwhile, nostalgia enthusiasts should be in hog heaven.

Remember those old fee-grabbing speed-trap days in Polk County? They'll soon be alive and well in K-town.

Sam Venable's column appears on Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. He may be reached at 865-342-6272 or [venob@knews.com](mailto:venob@knews.com). His latest book, "You Gotta Laugh to Keep from Cryin': A Baby Boomer Contemplates Life Beyond Fifty," is available at most bookstores and online from the News Sentinel.

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