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## Gov. Bredesen, listen to science - not politics - please

**July 13, 2005**

I read Don Jacobs' Parkway article in the July 1 edition of the News Sentinel (Page B1). Though bothered, I simply shook my head in dismay because people seem to think they can't do anything, when there is still the opportunity for the governor to change the proposed route.

Then I received a call from a very upset reader asking me to please repeat what I had said in an earlier column about it not being too late to change the Parkway route. OK, I'll try again.

I attended numerous Knox County Commission meetings regarding opposition to a zoning change to allow a commercial trucking operation in Solway. Residents were elated when the Metropolitan Planning Commission staff documented why the zoning should not be changed. Yet the commission approved the change - what? It took a whole lot more effort and compromise, and the zoning was changed, but not to full commercial. The commission ignored the city's own MPC technical experts - again.

There has been no final environmental impact study for the Parkway because the state is not using federal funds. The draft document does not show significant long- or short-term benefits of reducing traffic, especially trucks, around Knox (the primary goal). There is little benefit and a whole lot of detriment, yet the state approved it - science again lost to politics.

The Knox County Commission, the Tennessee Department of Transportation and other local or state agencies should either listen to their experts and the science, or save taxpayer money and let them go. And when they don't listen, they should be required to explain how they made their decision, present the data and justify every impact - not just vote and ignore reason.

The whole purpose of having professional staff or a contractor is to use tools of science (environmental, social, economic, long/short-term benefits, cost and impact) to determine the best decision. (Politicians use political tools.) Yet time and time again, science loses out to that four-letter word "politics" (I can count). Why in the world hire technical staff or a contractor if the decision will be made by political clout, big business and favors? So much anger and frustration would be negated if decisions were based on science and public good, not politics and special interests. Too, justification would be easy: "It's the right decision for the right reasons."

Is it too late to change the Parkway/Orange Route? Don't kid yourself - it's not. It was the wrong decision for the wrong reasons - political, not scientific/factual. We've all been led to believe it's over, but don't believe it - the governor's allowed to change his mind. What will it take? First: an "organized" effort to use the science/data already collected to show why the Parkway is clearly not the long- or short-term solution to Knoxville's traffic problem. Second: a powerful and fully attended presentation (residents, public, professionals) led by our two commissioners, directly to the governor, demonstrating the science and public support (in audience, not just on paper). Third: Demand that upon hearing the science and the people (no politics), he select the route that best accomplishes the goal, and if it's too expensive, wait for funding.

You have the science, the people and the organization; you need only to pull them together and give of your time. If you wait for others to do it, go purchase a "For Sale" sign, and don't forget, you're required by law to tell potential buyers the beauty and serenity of the valley will be traded for noise, concrete and pollution. (Barney Thompson, CEO of the Knoxville Area Association of Realtors, confirmed that any condition that affects the value, structural integrity or health of the occupants must be disclosed to prospective house buyers.)

Wish you success.

Timothy Joseph writes about Hardin Valley, Karns, Pellissippi Parkway and Solway. He may be reached at 865-927-3584 or [twjoseph@comcast.net](mailto:twjoseph@comcast.net).

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