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## 60 join TDOT at meeting to discuss state's 25-year road plan

By **DON JACOBS**, [jacobs@knews.com](mailto:jacobs@knews.com)  
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Some were concerned developers were burdening already overwhelmed roads.

One woman wondered about a tram service at the Sevierville exit No. 407 off Interstate 40. One man questioned if the state wasn't pouring billions of dollars into highways that will be outdated because of the expiration of liquid fuels.

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But they all came to help shape the state's transportation plan of the future by providing their input about the vision the Tennessee Department of Transportation is developing.

Sixty people joined TDOT officials Monday night at The Candy Factory to share their thoughts about the state's Long Range Transportation Plan. Public meetings are being conducted across the state to solicit public input for the 25-year plan.

The long-range plan should be complete by June 2005.

"I was overwhelmed by the response," said Ralph Comer, director of planning for TDOT. "There were more people than what I expected."

And these were no wallflowers. Each had questions about the future of transportation across Tennessee, with rail service and mass transit garnering a lot of attention.

"Almost everywhere we've gone, people have said they want more public transportation," Comer said.

Marleen Davis, a professor with the University of Tennessee College of Architecture, got a round of applause from participants when she spoke of the Knoxville Area Transit bus service for students.

"I think it's been a model of one of the best mass transit services available," Davis said. She added the future benefits are immeasurable because UT and KAT will produce students already acclimated to four years of mass transit.

Deborah Fleming, TDOT's project manager for the LRTP, noted state officials don't want to force the public into mass transit.

"We want to give people a choice for transportation," Fleming said.

"I was talking to a man who was amazed that no transit system in the United States pays for itself," she said. "The way I look at it, we're giving them money because it pays in other ways. The roads are already subsidized."

Comer said TDOT's budget is about \$1.4 billion annually, with half coming from federal funds. The rest comes from a state gasoline tax.

Bob Wolfenbarger, of Knoxville, is concerned that KAT's vision is falling short. He wondered if building a KAT transfer station off State Street, two blocks from the rails that bisect the Old City, would hinder multi-modal transportation of bus and rail in the future.

Ron Emrich questioned TDOT about its relationship with developers. He's concerned that subdivisions are popping up along an already congested Western Avenue/Oak Ridge Highway.

"Your roads just won't take the traffic," Emrich, of Karns, told Comer. "Do you ever deny a developer?"

Comer said that was a local planning decision.

Jeff Welch, executive director of the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization, said some developers are refused because of road issues. He noted widening of Western Avenue/Oak Ridge Highway was identified in 1986 as a need. Now right of way acquisition is under way for the section of road from Schaad Road to Interstate 640.

"The days of lots of money to build lots of roads are gone," Fleming said. "It's important that we spend our money wisely and establish priorities."

Susan Keller, president of the Citizens Against the Pellissippi Parkway Extension, Inc., or CAPPE, couldn't agree more.

"We see that every time you build a large road, communities suffer," said Keller, of Maryville. She wondered if TDOT would conduct new environmental impact studies on the 4.5-mile extension in Blount County that will connect State Route 33 and U.S. 321. The road has been held up in federal court because CAPPE alleged insufficient impact studies accompanied the decision to build the four-lane, divided highway.

"If we are free to follow through with that road, we will not do so without a full environmental impact statement," Comer said.

Keller said she was "delighted to hear" Comer's commitment.

"We've been trying to get an answer on this from the state for years," she said. Keller said she doesn't think TDOT has studied the impact of the road and its subsequent development, on already overcrowded schools.

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