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Knoxville beltway benefits overstated

This is in response to the Perspective article "Moving the masses" in the News Sentinel Nov. 28.

Tennessee Department of Transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely continues to overstate the benefits of the proposed Knoxville beltway and ignores the pending transportation crisis facing the West Knoxville Interstate-40/75 corridor.

Nicely specifically cited the I-40/75 Papermill Drive interchange as a trouble spot. The commissioner has, however, ignored TDOT's own beltway draft environmental impact statement that estimates, at best, the beltway would decrease I-40/75 traffic at Papermill Drive by only 9 percent.

Conversely, the year 2025 level of service estimates along the I-40/75 West Knoxville corridor from Papermill Drive to the I-40/75 split is "F" (total failure), whether or not the beltway is built.

The beltway remains a panacea for I-40/75 West Knoxville congestion problems, when in fact its positive impact will be negligible relative to the gargantuan size of the problem.

The estimated 30,850 vehicles that would use the route is irrelevant when compared to the estimate of more than 125,000 vehicles clogging the I-40/75 corridor.

TDOT continues to be in denial that west Knoxville's I-40/75 congestion problems are the direct result of its poor planning in the past and shows no sign of improving on this poor record in the future.

The proposed beltway project is inadequate because its design and selection were not based on any needs or problem analysis, development of requirements criteria and benefit-based selection between alternative projects.

These are the elements of good project planning.

The ongoing context-sensitive solutions process cannot cover up the fact that the beltway will do little to improve West Knoxville's congestion problems.

These problems need to be addressed in a systematic way, using good project planning techniques and new transportation alternatives showing meaningful improvements developed and implemented.

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