

Analysis of Proposed Pellissippi Parkway Extension (PPE)

Developed by The Raven Society, February 2008

This new interstate highway would significantly accelerate new residential and commercial growth in eastern Blount County. For this reason, The Raven Society opposes it. The mission of the Raven Society is “to support policies and practices that protect the rural, natural, and historic qualities of Blount County.” The new growth will occur in an area of open spaces and working farms, much of which inevitably will be turned into subdivisions. One of the county’s last remaining natural and rural areas will become suburban sprawl, and Blount County will be one more large step toward becoming a suburb of Knoxville and a bedroom community for Oak Ridge. “Growth in the northeast segment of the County can be expected with this new roadway due to the improved access between this area and Knoxville” (2006 Blount County Land Use Strategy by Hunter Interests, Inc.). Protecting the rural, natural, and historic nature of Blount County requires opposition to the Pellissippi Parkway Extension.

There are less obvious reasons for The Raven Society’s position, and they should be of concern to all Blount Countians.

- **This growth will add new costs to the County for public services** such as schools, roads, courts, law enforcement and emergency services. “Major transportation corridors such as the Pellissippi Parkway... warrant additional analysis and examination based on the impacts of increased population counts.” (Hunter Interests study)
- **Neither TDOT nor any local governing body has analyzed the projected impact of the PPE on Blount County’s budget.** We already know some of what will happen. According to David Bennett, County Director of Accounts and Budget, the cost of providing schools to new residential development is greater than the property tax revenue generated by it (“The Economics of Growth in Blount County,” May 2005). “For each \$1 of revenue received from residential properties in FY 2005, Blount County spent \$1.23 providing services. For each \$1 from commercial and industrial land uses, the county spent 25 cents; and for each \$1 received from farm, forest and open land uses, the county spent 41 cents” according to the “Cost of Community Services Study, Blount County, Tennessee” commissioned by the Tennessee Farm Bureau and conducted by American Farmland Trust in 2006.
- **We believe that the City of Maryville will annex the land around the intersections** of the PPE with Sevierville Rd. and E.Lamar Alexander Parkway and gain the commercial tax revenue from the inevitable development that will replace the currently open lands near these intersections. The City of Alcoa has already annexed the area at the end of the Pellissippi Parkway at Old Knoxville Highway and will receive revenue from the commercial developments there.
- The Cities of Alcoa and Maryville, strong advocates of the PPE, will get most of the commercial tax revenues from it, but Blount County will have to educate the children who will live near the extension. Residential development in Louisville and Maryville is

already adding substantially to the county's public service obligations, according to Mayor Cunningham's address to the Blount County Commission in January 2008. He noted that the City of Louisville and the Maryville Regional Planning Commission recently approved 471 subdivision lots in areas outside of Maryville's urban growth boundary that the County is required to service with infrastructure. Children in those areas will go to county schools.

- One of TDOT's arguments for the PPE is that there has been "expanding residential development in eastern Alcoa and Maryville and northeastern Blount County." Extending the Pellissippi Parkway to US 321 will only encourage and enable even greater residential development there. It will contribute to turning the area into a bedroom community for people who work in Knoxville and Oak Ridge and thus add to the "increasing demand for trips" to which TDOT's "statement of needs" refers. The encouragement of sprawl is not a transportation need but rather the consequence of poor transportation decisions.
- Approval of subdivisions by the cities is an issue over which the County has little control. There are other forces putting pressure on Blount County's public service obligations, however, over which Blount County actually does have influence, if not control. One such issue is whether to build the Pellissippi Parkway Extension, but the County has neither objected to the project nor asked TDOT to analyze its impact on the County's budget and tax rate.
- **Blount County's roads in the northeast quadrant already are inadequate** and in need of major improvements, even before the addition of the thousands more daily trips that will come with rapid residential growth.
- **TDOT's own recent traffic studies**, as reported at the public meeting in October 2007, **confirm that the PPE will not alleviate traffic congestion and poor levels of service on the major arterial roads.** In fact, completion of the PPE will make traffic on some of them worse and leave the rest relatively unchanged. In addition, putting more traffic on US 411 N will only exacerbate the problems of that road. US 129 will be essentially unaffected by the PPE and the PPE cannot help US 321, which it will feed.
- The PPE will not solve Blount County's serious traffic problems and challenges. Alternative uses of transportation funds, however, can help, and will prevent the loss of open space and farms and the addition hundreds of new children into Blount County's schools. For example:
 - The major traffic congestion in Maryville is east-west, on SR 33 (East Broadway) and US 411 North (Sevierville Rd.) and South (West Broadway). Because the PPE is a north-south route, it cannot help this problem. One solution is to upgrade SR 33 from the end of the Pellissippi Parkway west into Maryville, add a center turn lane, and reconfigure the Wildwood Rd./Lincoln/Broadway intersection.

- Upgrading and straightening Peppermint, Hitch, and Helton Roads will improve traffic moving north-south from the end of the Pellissippi Parkway.
- Road improvements within the Cities of Maryville and Alcoa suggested by the Hunter Interests study will facilitate traffic flow within the cities and offer better options than building the PPE. To date neither city has moved to implement them.

TDOT argues that because the PPE has been planned since the 1970's it should be completed. Perhaps a four-lane roadway between I-40 and US 321 was needed then, but it is not needed now. At that time there was no four-lane route from I-40 to US 321 except for US 129 from Knoxville. Now, I-40 is connected to US 321 by three four lane highways: US 321 from Lenoir City; I-140 to US 129 from west Knoxville; and US 129 from Knoxville. The Hall Road-Washington St. split off of US 129 just south of the airport is a direct route to US 321 from Knoxville and I-140 and it is not congested or accident-prone. In fact, TDOT recently changed the lane alignments at that split to allow two lanes to carry the US 129 South traffic (straight toward the Wal-Marts) and one lane to carry the traffic toward Hall Road and then merge with US 321.

TDOT offers four “additional (non transportation) objectives” for the PPE, which actually serve to emphasize why The Raven Society opposes it. Their objectives and our responses are as follows:

- “Support community and growth management goals.” These goals, as outlined in the Blount County Policies Plan and Conceptual Land Use Plan, are to maintain the rural, small town character of the County, concentrate development within the cities’ urban growth boundaries, and preserve open and agricultural lands. The PPE will promote sprawl, unchecked residential and commercial growth.
- “Minimize adverse impacts to neighborhoods and businesses.” The PPE will adversely impact neighborhoods and businesses in its path (e.g., Northfield).
- “Minimize adverse impacts to farmlands.” The PPE will destroy current working farms.
- “Minimize adverse impacts to the natural and cultural environment.” Essentially all of the public water for Maryville and Alcoa and the part of Blount County near the PPE comes from the Little River, which already cannot supply current demand and is at risk of degradation from this project and its consequences. Traffic and residential and commercial developments generated by the PPE will contribute to air, noise, and light pollution. The PPE will endanger and damage the natural and cultural environment.