

Seat 10 Candidate Responses

Justin Cofer

Introduction

- ❖ Please briefly describe yourself and why you are running for Knox County Commission.
 - *I am running because Knox County is growing without a solid plan, and our families are feeling the impact. Our roads are struggling to keep up, our schools are overcrowded, and taxpayers are being asked to carry the burden of poor planning.*

Use of Active Transportation

- ❖ How often do you walk for transportation?
 - *Occasionally*
- ❖ How often do you walk for recreation?
 - *Somewhat frequently*
- ❖ How often do you ride a bicycle for transportation?
 - *Occasionally*
- ❖ How often do you ride a bicycle for recreation?
 - *Occasionally*
- ❖ How often do you take public transportation?
 - *Very infrequently*

Allocation of Resources for Active Transportation

- ❖ How do you feel about the current allocation of County resources to pedestrian infrastructure?
 - *Needs to be somewhat increased*
- ❖ Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Pedestrian infrastructure is important, but it has to be done the right way and in the right order.*
 - *In Knox County, we have fallen behind on basic infrastructure like roads and schools, and that has to be our priority. At the same time, when we are planning growth, pedestrian infrastructure like sidewalks and safe crossings should be built first, not added later after problems already exist.*
- ❖ How do you feel about the current allocation of County resources to bicycle infrastructure?
 - *Current allocation is sufficient*

- ❖ Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Bicycle infrastructure has value, but like everything else, it comes down to prioritization and planning.*
 - *Right now, Knox County is behind on core infrastructure like roads and schools, so those have to come first. That said, when we are planning new growth or major projects, bicycle infrastructure should be considered and built in from the beginning where there is real demand, not added later as an afterthought.*
- ❖ Please describe what your active transportation priorities would be as a member of the Knox County Commission.
 - *First, we need to make sure pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is included upfront in areas where it makes sense, especially near schools, high traffic corridors, and growing communities. These should be built as part of the initial plan, not added later after safety issues arise.*
 - *Second, I want to ensure our investments are targeted. That means focusing on projects with real usage, clear safety benefits, and connectivity, not one off projects that do not serve a broader purpose.*
 - *Third, all of this has to be balanced with our core responsibilities. Knox County is behind on roads and schools, so we must prioritize those while still planning smart, integrated infrastructure that supports all users.*

Active Transportation Safety

The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), which provides comprehensive transportation planning to Knox County, recently published the Regional Roadway Safety Action Plan, making the commitment to reduce fatalities by 66% by 2045. A critical aspect of this work is improving safety for vulnerable road users, as cyclists and pedestrians are 25 times more likely to be killed in a traffic crash compared to a motorist.

- ❖ As a member of the Knox County Commission, what would your priorities be regarding safety for all roadway users, especially vulnerable roadway users such as cyclists and pedestrians?
 - *My top priority is safety, and that starts with proper planning.*
 - *Roads, sidewalks, and crossings should be designed together from the beginning, especially near schools and high traffic areas, not added later after problems arise.*
 - *We also need to focus on high impact improvements like dangerous intersections and visibility, while making sure we stay disciplined with taxpayer dollars.*

- *At the end of the day, safe roads come from planning it right the first time.*
- ❖ What opportunities do you see for Knox County to pursue the goal of reducing roadway deaths and serious injuries?
 - *I could write an essay on this, because this is one of those issues where small decisions have real consequences.*
 - *A big opportunity for Knox County is simply slowing down and planning better. Too often, we approve growth and deal with safety later, and that is when people get hurt. If we design roads, intersections, and developments correctly from the start, we prevent those problems instead of reacting to them.*
 - *We also need to be honest about where the risks are. There are specific intersections and corridors people already know are dangerous, and those should be prioritized and fixed first.*
 - *Sometimes common sense and formulas are not the same. We need to use real world judgment, not just check boxes, to make sure what we build is actually safe.*
 - *Reducing deaths is not complicated, but it does require discipline. Plan it right, build it right, and stop putting people in unsafe situations to begin with.*

Active Transportation Infrastructure

- ❖ Please indicate your support for the following:
 - Sidewalks
 - *Strongly favor*
 - Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *At the end of the day, this is about common sense. If people are walking, they should not be sharing space with vehicles when we have the ability to design it better from the start.*
 - Unprotected bike lanes (bike lanes without any physical barriers providing separation from the lane of vehicular traffic)
 - *Somewhat oppose*
 - Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *If we are going to spend taxpayer dollars, we need to make sure it is actually improving safety. On many roads, simply painting a line does not provide meaningful protection, especially in higher speed or high traffic areas.*
 - *There may be cases where unprotected lanes make sense on lower speed roads, but we have to be honest about the tradeoffs. Not every road is appropriate for every type of use, so we need to focus on*

placing infrastructure where it makes sense and where it can be used safely.

- Protected bike lanes (bike lanes with physical barriers providing separation from the lane of vehicular traffic)
 - *Somewhat favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Protected bike lanes can improve safety when they are used in the right places, but we have to be realistic about cost and priorities.*
 - *These projects are more expensive, so we need to make sure they are targeted to areas with real demand, such as high traffic corridors or where they connect to existing routes and actually get used. In a perfect world with no budgeting concerns I would love these everywhere.*
- Greenways
 - *Somewhat favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Greenways make sense when they are done right.*
 - *They give people a place to walk and bike without being in the road, and that is a safer option than trying to force everything onto the same streets.*
 - *But I am not in favor of building them just to say we did it. They need to connect to something, be used, and actually serve a purpose.*
 - *Like everything else, it comes down to priorities. We have to take care of our roads and core infrastructure first, and then make sure anything else we build is worth the cost and planned correctly.*
- Traffic calming (improvements in non-motorist safety, mobility, and comfort typically achieved by reducing vehicle speeds or volumes on a single street or a street network)
 - *Strongly favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *I am in favor of traffic calming because it works when it is applied correctly.*
 - *In neighborhoods and school zones, slowing traffic saves lives. I have seen where the process breaks down.*
 - *When I was HOA President, we tried to get traffic calming in our neighborhood, but we were told where devices could go instead of being heard on where they were actually needed.*
 - *Sometimes common sense and formulas are not the same.*

- ❖ Please describe your vision for active transportation infrastructure in Knox County, and how you would use your position as a member of the Knox County Commission to achieve that vision.
 - *My vision for active transportation in Knox County is simple. It should be safe, practical, and planned correctly from the start.*
 - *That means sidewalks, greenways, and bike infrastructure are included upfront where they make sense, not added later after problems already exist.*
 - *We also need direct input from the community and groups working to improve safety. The people using these roads every day should have a voice.*
 - *As a County Commissioner, I will push for better planning, coordination, and disciplined spending so we focus on what actually works.*

Miscellaneous

- ❖ In respect to active transportation in Knox County, what do you think the County has done well?
 - *I think there have been some efforts, but overall, we have fallen short.*
 - *Too much of what has been done feels reactive instead of planned. We are trying to fix problems after they show up instead of designing things correctly from the beginning.*
 - *My time in a United States Air Force Civil Engineering Squadron taught me the importance of planning it right the first time, because when you do not, people feel the consequences.*
 - *That is exactly why I am running. We need more disciplined planning so we get it right the first time.*
- ❖ In respect to active transportation in Knox County, what do you think the County could do better?
 - *The County needs to do a better job planning ahead instead of reacting after problems show up.*
 - *Right now, too much of our infrastructure is pieced together. Sidewalks, bike lanes, and crossings are often added later instead of being included from the start.*
 - *My time in a United States Air Force Civil Engineering Squadron taught me that if you do not plan it right the first time, you pay for it later.*
 - *We also need to do a better job listening to the community. The people who live there know where the problems are, and that input needs to be part of the process.*
 - *If we focus on disciplined planning and real world input, we can build infrastructure that is safer, more effective, and actually works. Doing it right the first time saves lives and money.*

- ❖ Is there anything else you would like to share related to active transportation, safety, and/or infrastructure?
 - *I would just say this, none of this is complicated, but it does require discipline.*
 - *We have to stop approving growth without a plan and then trying to fix the problems later. That is how we end up with unsafe roads, overcrowded schools, and taxpayers footing the bill.*
 - *I want a Knox County where my kids can ride their bikes safely in our own community without having to drive somewhere first. I want to protect our agricultural land from being overrun by poorly planned development.*
 - *And I want to make sure we are building a county that works for the people who live here, not just reacting after the damage is done.*
 - *Plan it right, build it right, and listen to the people who use it every day. That is how we improve safety, protect what matters, and use taxpayer dollars responsibly. Thank you for the survey.*

Katina Sharp

Introduction

- ❖ Please briefly describe yourself and why you are running for Knox County Commission.
 - *I am Rev. Dr. Katina Sharp – pastor, mother of four, and 40-year Knox County resident. I am running for Knox County Commission At-Large Seat 10 because I believe this county should work for everyone who lives here, not just those with the loudest voices or the most resources. My ministry has taught me to pay attention to who gets left out. I'm bringing that same lens to county government – to fight for safe streets, fully funded schools, affordable housing, and infrastructure that serves every resident. I want to leave Knox County better than I found it.*

Use of Active Transportation

- ❖ How often do you walk for transportation?
 - *Very infrequently*
- ❖ How often do you walk for recreation?
 - *Somewhat frequently*
- ❖ How often do you ride a bicycle for transportation?
 - *Very infrequently*
- ❖ How often do you ride a bicycle for recreation?
 - *Occasionally*
- ❖ How often do you take public transportation?
 - *Somewhat infrequently*

Allocation of Resources for Active Transportation

- ❖ How do you feel about the current allocation of County resources to pedestrian infrastructure?
 - *Needs to be greatly increased*
- ❖ Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Knox County's current investment in pedestrian infrastructure does not match the scale of the need. Sidewalk gaps remain dangerous and widespread. Too many residents – particularly children, seniors, and people without access to a car – have no safe way to move through their own neighborhoods on foot. Meanwhile, our road budgets continue to prioritize vehicle capacity over human safety.*
 - *This is a values choice, and I believe we are making the wrong one. The justification for greatly increased investment is straightforward: the safety*

data demands it, the equity case is clear, and the return on investment – in reduced healthcare costs, increased property values, and a more accessible county – is well documented. We are not lacking evidence. We are lacking political will. I intend to help change that.

- ❖ How do you feel about the current allocation of County resources to bicycle infrastructure?
 - *Needs to be greatly increased*
- ❖ Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Deeply insufficient – and for many of the same reasons.*
 - *Knox County's investment in bicycle infrastructure has not kept pace with our growth, our safety data, or our residents' demonstrated appetite for active transportation options. We have a greenway network worth building on and almost no protected on-road cycling infrastructure to connect it to where people actually live, work, and go to school. The result is a system that works for confident adult cyclists on good days and almost no one else.*
 - *The case for greatly increased investment is the same as it is for pedestrian infrastructure: the safety need is documented, the equity argument is compelling, and the fiscal return is real. Every dollar we don't spend on protected bike infrastructure is a cost we're pushing onto emergency responders, healthcare systems, and families who deserve better. We can afford to build a county where cycling is a genuine transportation option. What we haven't had is the political commitment to do it. I want to change that.*
- ❖ Please describe what your active transportation priorities would be as a member of the Knox County Commission.
 - *My active transportation priorities come down to one conviction: Knox County should be a place where every resident – regardless of age, income, ability, or car ownership – can move through their community safely and with dignity.*
 - *In practice that means: closing greenway gaps and treating connectivity as a requirement, not a bonus; embedding complete streets standards into every major road project from the planning stage; prioritizing safe routes to every school in the county; centering equity by directing investment toward the neighborhoods most dependent on walking and biking; and competing aggressively for every federal and state dollar available for active transportation infrastructure.*
 - *A county commissioner controls budgets, sets priorities, and approves development. I will use every one of those levers – asking in every budget conversation whether active transportation is funded at the level our safety*

data demands, and asking in every development review whether a proposal makes our network better or worse.

- *Knox County has the foundation. What it needs is the political will to build on it. That is what I am running to provide.*

Active Transportation Safety

The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), which provides comprehensive transportation planning to Knox County, recently published the Regional Roadway Safety Action Plan, making the commitment to reduce fatalities by 66% by 2045. A critical aspect of this work is improving safety for vulnerable road users, as cyclists and pedestrians are 25 times more likely to be killed in a traffic crash compared to a motorist.

- ❖ As a member of the Knox County Commission, what would your priorities be regarding safety for all roadway users, especially vulnerable roadway users such as cyclists and pedestrians?
 - *Safety is the baseline obligation of every elected official with a vote on how our roads are built. Knox County's roads were designed around a single assumption: that everyone is in a car. That assumption has never been true, and it is less true every year.*
 - *My priorities: move Knox County toward a Vision Zero framework that treats every traffic fatality as a preventable policy failure, not an inevitability. Redesign for the most vulnerable users first – protected lanes, raised crosswalks, pedestrian refuge islands – because infrastructure that works for the most vulnerable works better for everyone. Address speed, which is the single greatest determinant of whether a collision is survivable. Fix dangerous intersections using crash data, not politics. And engage the communities most affected – those who walk and bike out of necessity – in the decisions that shape their safety.*
 - *No one in Knox County should have to risk their life to get where they're going. That is not a radical position. It is the minimum standard a functioning county government should meet. I intend to hold us to it.*
- ❖ What opportunities do you see for Knox County to pursue the goal of reducing roadway deaths and serious injuries?
 - *Knox County is at an inflection point. We are growing fast, federal infrastructure dollars are on the table, and we have the opportunity right now to make decisions that will shape how people move through this county for the next generation.*

- *The opportunities are concrete. Federal and state funding is available – we need to go get it, which requires grant-writing capacity, intergovernmental relationships, and elected officials who know what's on the table. Every new development project is a chance to require infrastructure that reduces risk for all users – we should be using development standards and conditions of approval to make that happen. Our crash data already tells us where people are most likely to be killed or seriously injured – we should be publishing that data publicly and tying our transportation investments directly to it. School zones deserve focused, immediate attention as high-concentration pedestrian danger areas. And regional coordination with the City of Knoxville, TDOT, and the Knoxville Regional TPO can unlock safety investments that no single jurisdiction can achieve alone.*
- *The resources exist. The data exists. The policy tools exist. What it takes is the political will to use them – and the understanding that every preventable death on our roads is a cost Knox County cannot keep paying.*

Active Transportation Infrastructure

❖ Please indicate your support for the following:

➤ Sidewalks

■ *Strongly favor*

➤ Please explain the reasoning behind your response.

- *I am strongly in favor of sidewalks because sidewalks are how a community says: you belong here, and you are safe here.*
- *I'll make it personal. I live half a mile from a dog park. I have to drive my dogs there because the road connecting my neighborhood to the park has no sidewalk and isn't safe to walk. Half a mile. That is silly – and it is a small, everyday example of the larger failure Knox County's pedestrian infrastructure represents.*
- *I am a mother and a pastor. I think about the child walking to school along the edge of a 45 mph road because there is no other option. The senior who wants to walk to church but can't because there's no safe path. The working family trying to cut transportation costs by walking to the bus stop. These are my neighbors. They are members of my congregation. They are Knox County residents whose safety should matter to their county government.*
- *Sidewalks are also just good government – they reduce fatalities, increase physical activity, raise property values, and deliver a clear return on investment. What has been missing is the political will to prioritize them. I intend to help provide it.*

- Unprotected bike lanes (bike lanes without any physical barriers providing separation from the lane of vehicular traffic)
 - *Somewhat favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *Unprotected bike lanes are better than nothing – but they are not good enough to be our destination.*
 - *A stripe of paint between a cyclist and a 40 mph traffic lane does little to protect anyone who isn't already a confident, experienced adult rider. If our infrastructure only works for fearless cyclists, we haven't built a real cycling network. We've built a suggestion.*
 - *I understand the fiscal and political reality. Protected infrastructure costs more and takes longer to build, and in some corridors right-of-way constraints make full separation genuinely difficult. Unprotected lanes can be an acceptable interim step – but only if we are honest that they are interim, with a documented commitment to upgrade rather than a permanent checkbox.*
 - *Where we are building new infrastructure or doing significant road reconstruction, the default should be protection. The standard for new construction should not be the minimum we can get away with. It should be what actually works – infrastructure that a ten-year-old and a seventy-year-old would both feel comfortable using.*
 - *Paint fades. Protection saves lives. Knox County should know the difference.*
- Protected bike lanes (bike lanes with physical barriers providing separation from the lane of vehicular traffic)
 - *Strongly favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *I strongly support protected bike lanes. The evidence is not ambiguous – they reduce injuries and fatalities, and they increase cycling rates among the people we most need to reach: children, older adults, first-time cyclists, and anyone who wants to ride but reasonably concludes that unprotected lanes aren't safe enough.*
 - *A bike lane that only works for confident adult cyclists isn't really public infrastructure – it's infrastructure for a subset of the public. Protected lanes are how we make cycling genuinely accessible to everyone.*
 - *I take the cost seriously. But compare it honestly against what we spend widening roads, building parking, and managing the long-term public health costs of preventable crashes. Protected infrastructure is*

not an extravagance – it is cost-effective investment in a county that works for everyone.

- *My commitment as a commissioner is to make protected bike lanes the default expectation for new construction and major road reconstruction – not a special accommodation we negotiate case by case, but a standard we build to because we've decided that cyclists' lives matter.*
- *Paint fades. Protection saves lives. Knox County should know the difference.*
- Greenways
 - *Strongly favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *I love our greenways – and I want so much more of them.*
 - *Knox County and the City of Knoxville have built something genuinely special. Our greenway network draws users of all ages and abilities and proves a simple point: when we build active transportation infrastructure that feels safe and inviting, people use it. That is proof of concept for everything else I want to see built.*
 - *But our network is unfinished and frustratingly disconnected in places. A world-class trail that dead-ends at a busy road isn't a transportation network – it's a recreational amenity. I want it to be both. That means closing priority gaps, connecting greenways to schools, employment centers, and transit stops, coordinating across jurisdictional lines so trails don't stop at city limits, and acquiring land proactively before development forecloses our options.*
 - *Knox County's greenways are one of our greatest quality-of-life assets and one of our most underutilized transportation assets. I want to close that gap – literally and figuratively.*
- Traffic calming (improvements in non-motorist safety, mobility, and comfort typically achieved by reducing vehicle speeds or volumes on a single street or a street network)
 - *Strongly favor*
- Please explain the reasoning behind your response.
 - *I strongly support traffic calming – because speed kills, and that is not hyperbole. It is physics. A pedestrian struck at 20 mph has a high survival rate. At 40 mph, the odds flip dramatically. Every design choice that encourages higher vehicle speeds in areas where people walk, bike, and live has real consequences for real people.*

- *What I appreciate most about traffic calming is that it works with human behavior rather than against it. A wide, straight road feels like a road you're supposed to drive fast on – and people do. Narrowed lanes, raised crosswalks, curb extensions, and street trees send a different message. Good design makes lower speeds feel natural.*
 - *Traffic calming is also cost-effective. Flexible delineators and painted interventions can be deployed quickly and cheaply to test what works before committing to permanent construction. Knox County should be using these tools, especially where people are being hurt and capital funding is years away.*
 - *The default in Knox County has always been to prioritize vehicle speed. I think we should rebalance that default. Neighborhoods are for people – and our roads should reflect that.*
- ❖ *Please describe your vision for active transportation infrastructure in Knox County, and how you would use your position as a member of the Knox County Commission to achieve that vision.*
 - *My vision is simple to state and serious to pursue: Knox County should be a place where every resident – regardless of age, income, ability, or whether they own a car – can move through their community safely and with dignity.*
 - *I am a pastor and a mother of four. I pay attention to who gets left out. I see the kid walking along a road with no sidewalk. The senior whose world has shrunk to whatever she can reach on foot. The family that would love to bike to school but looks at our roads and concludes it isn't safe. These are not edge cases. These are our neighbors. And right now, Knox County is not built for them.*
 - *Changing that means a connected countywide network where greenways, protected lanes, and safe pedestrian infrastructure link neighborhoods to schools, jobs, and transit. It means Vision Zero – treating every roadway fatality as a preventable policy failure. It means equity at the center of every investment decision. It means requiring active transportation value from every new development and every road reconstruction project. And it means competing aggressively for every federal and state dollar available.*
 - *A county commissioner controls budgets, sets priorities, and approves development. I will use every one of those levers. And I will show up – not just at election time, but at every budget hearing, planning meeting, and commission vote where these decisions get made.*
 - *Knox County is worth fighting for. The people who walk and bike and push strollers and use wheelchairs through it every day are worth fighting for. I intend to do exactly that.*

Miscellaneous

- ❖ In respect to active transportation in Knox County, what do you think the County has done well?
 - *The greenway network is a genuine asset and a point of legitimate pride. When we build active transportation infrastructure that feels safe and inviting, people use it – enthusiastically, and across all ages and demographics. That is proof of concept for everything else I want to see built.*
 - *The regional conversation has also matured. Complete streets language, safe routes to school programming, and pedestrian safety considerations are increasingly part of the planning process in ways they weren't a generation ago. That shift happened because advocates, planners, and some elected officials pushed for it, and that foundation matters.*
 - *I want to be honest, though: much of the most significant progress has been city-led, and county-specific policy has lagged behind the enthusiasm residents clearly have for these investments. There is a demonstrated model of success here worth learning from. What I want to bring to the Commission is the political will to match the community's ambition.*
- ❖ In respect to active transportation in Knox County, what do you think the County could do better?
 - *The honest answer is: most of it.*
 - *Knox County has the greenway foundation. What we lack is the countywide commitment to build on it – in policy, in funding, and in the everyday decisions that shape how our roads get built and who they serve.*
 - *Make it a budget priority. Safe sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and greenway gap closures should have dedicated, recurring funding – not fight for scraps in every budget cycle.*
 - *Require it in new development. We have the tools – development standards, conditions of approval, complete streets requirements – to make sure new construction adds active transportation value. We're not using them consistently enough.*
 - *Close the greenway gaps. The gaps in our trail network are the difference between a recreational amenity and a real transportation network. Closing them needs a timeline and a funding commitment behind it.*
 - *Center equity. The neighborhoods most dependent on walking and biking have received the least investment. An explicit equity framework for how we prioritize active transportation dollars is long overdue.*

- *Lead, don't just respond. Knox County needs elected officials who bring active transportation to the table proactively – not officials who support it when asked and forget it when the meeting ends.*
- ❖ *Is there anything else you would like to share related to active transportation, safety, and/or infrastructure?*
 - *Active transportation is sometimes framed as a niche issue, a nice-to-have. I reject that framing entirely. When a child can't walk to school safely, that is a justice issue. When a senior is stranded because she can't drive, that is a dignity issue. When a working family can't safely bike to the bus stop, that is an equity issue. These are not transportation problems – they are community problems, and they have community solutions.*
 - *To Bike Walk Knoxville directly: I see you as a partner, not a constituency to be managed. I don't want your endorsement and then your silence. I want your accountability. Hold me to what I've said here, show up at commission meetings, and tell me when I'm falling short. That is how we move this county forward together.*
 - *Knox County is worth fighting for. The people who walk and bike and push strollers and use wheelchairs through it every day are worth fighting for. I intend to do exactly that.*