

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.*