

Guest Blog: Let's create an escape plan for Nashville's downtown traffic

Sep 9, 2016, 12:31pm CDT

The NBJ's Aug. 26 cover story informed us what we already feared: There is no plan to alleviate traffic congestion.

No plan? How can this be?



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Unquestionably, Nashville has mushroomed. One of my clients owns a crane company. He complained that six or seven years ago business was so bad he was lucky to rent out a hammer. Now he has an enormous waiting list to rent his cranes.

Buildings are sprouting everywhere with no thought to the infrastructure, much less the road net which needs to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of vehicles. Pedestrian traffic is also increasing as cars must now also navigate around people.

How is it we have no plan in place? It is not too late to come up with a solution?

In 1853 Napoleon III transformed Paris by widening many avenues to ease the over-crowding. What the French emperor did with the City of Light might be emulated by our leaders here in the Music City.

While it may take legislative approval, I suggest we enact a "building" tax on new construction as in indirect way to at least moderate unbridled growth. This has been proposed, but soundly rejected by the developers most of whom do not live in Nashville.

The income from the building tax could be used for infrastructure and some modest eminent domain suits to reclaim blocks of property to widen our streets.

As our buildings grow taller and more numerous, our roads have not expanded an inch. You can measure the width of Church Street with a ruler. Broadway is simply not that broad.

A more immediate solution can be found by employing traffic control employees so prevalent in Chicago. Virtually every choke point in Chicago's business district has vehicles at least moving because humans are better at this task than traffic lights no matter how well automated.

We employ traffic control personnel at our schools and during sporting events. Why shouldn't we expand on this concept for most of downtown Nashville? (And no, I do not suggest that our police department should perform this task. Our highly trained officers are there to protect us, not to see we get to work on time.)

Truck deliveries to local businesses are important. Perhaps we should pass an ordinance as they did in ancient Rome limiting deliveries to the evening hours, freeing the streets for the citizens during the day. Produce, beer and soft drink trucks should not be double parked on Fifth Avenue during rush hours.

Unless we have a plan, a solution will be forced on us by eternal gridlock. Cities such as Athens and Bogota utilize road rationing, whereby a vehicle can only be driven on certain days depending on the order of digits on one's license plate. These and other cities have alternate day travel schemes which exempt only electric vehicles.

One reason Napoleon III widened the roads of Paris was because citizens could quickly erect barricades in narrow streets during a revolt. I realize our mayor is not the emperor of France or Rome but our citizens are near to revolt as we sit for hours in traffic and learn there is no plan or solution.

There should be.

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