Written by Christie James
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Folks turned out to the Broyhill Inn yesterday afternoon and evening to learn more about the Department of Transportation's plans to widen Highway 421 between Newmarket Center and the Daniel Boone Inn.

The recommended plan shows the road being widened to a four lane along this stretch with a central median and bike lanes on each side. Right of ways along the south of the current highway will be used in the widening. Acquisition is scheduled to begin in August 2008. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2010 and is expected to last about two years. The Town of Boone, Watauga County School Board and Commissioners are urging the DOT to move the project schedule up in order to coincide more closely with construction of the new Watauga High School. The widening is not without its challenges. Lewis said that the highway will remain open during the construction, though they have not worked out particulars on how that will occur. Also, several businesses currently located on the southern side of the route will be displaced by the widening. Though the DOT offers some relocation assistance, that process is not without its challenges. There is still time to view the plans and provide public comment. Comments may be submitted to Ed Lewis at elewis@dot.state.nc.us . One may also email Lewis for an electronic copy of the widening plan. The Public Comment Period ends in one month on April 13th.