



Transportation Coalition of Tennessee launches education campaign amid statewide transportation and infrastructure crisis

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (May 13, 2015) – A coalition of transportation experts announced today that Tennessee is in a transportation infrastructure funding crisis that threatens the safety of drivers and the economic competitiveness of the state.

“Tennessee’s transportation system is now in crisis,” said Susie Alcorn, executive director of the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance. “At a time when our state is growing – in terms of population and economy – we no longer have the ability to create and maintain a transportation infrastructure to support it.”

The Transportation Coalition of Tennessee formed late last year to shed light on the growing transportation issues and put pressure on Tennessee’s lawmakers to address those issues.

Bill Moore, chairman of the Tennessee Infrastructure Alliance and former chief engineer for TDOT, says the growing number of committed but unfunded transportation projects will only get larger and more expensive if they are not addressed now.

“These are all projects TDOT has identified as needs,” said Moore. “A maintenance-only budget not only means no new roads or transportation options, but it also means less safe roads, more traffic congestion and more inconvenience for motorists.”

Notable projects in the Knoxville area include:

- US 129 (Alcoa Highway) from near the Knoxville Airport in Blount County to the Cherokee Trail interchange at the UT Hospital in Knox County. This section of Alcoa Highway provides access to residents of Alcoa and Maryville to Knoxville and I-40/I-75 and provides access to the Knoxville Airport for residents of Knox County. For a number of years TDOT has proposed to widen and reconstruct this section, but the estimated cost of \$270 million has kept the project from progressing. Due to the extremely high cost, this roadway is divided into several construction projects. Traffic on this roadway is approximately 57,000 vehicles/day near the Knoxville Airport, while the average in the Knox County section is around 50,000 vehicles/day. For a number of years, Alcoa Highway has experienced a high crash rate due to the high traffic volumes and the development that has occurred along this section, especially in Blount County. Yesterday, US Secretary of Transportation Anthony Fox reviewed this section of Alcoa Highway with local city officials while visiting Knoxville.
- Extension of SR 162 (Pellissippi Parkway) from SR 33 (Knoxville Highway) to US 321 in Blount County. TDOT has for several years proposed the extension of Pellissippi

Parkway from its existing terminus at SR 33 in Alcoa to US 321, a distance of 4.4 miles, to provide improved access to motorists trying to access the Great Smoky Mountains National Park from I-40/I-75 in Knox County. Existing traffic on SR 162 between Alcoa and I-40 is around 35,000 vehicles/day. Environmental and engineering studies are currently underway, and no updated cost estimate is available.

- SR 62 (Western Avenue) from Texas Avenue to Major Avenue in Knoxville. TDOT proposes to reconstruct this 0.8-mile section of roadway in downtown Knoxville at a cost of \$19.2 million. The roadway carries around 19,000 vehicles/day.

“This is not just a state problem. Counties are impacted too. We operate county roads and bridges that are funded largely through state transportation dollars,” said Rodney Carmical, executive director of the Tennessee County Highway Officials Association and a coalition member.

“Keeping our infrastructure adequately funded makes our roads and bridges safer for our residents, it makes our commutes better and more efficient, and it improves our state economy,” Carmical said.

State and local transportation projects in Tennessee are funded primarily by state and federal fuel-tax revenues. These projects include maintenance, repair and new construction. Tennessee’s fuel taxes have not changed since 1989, yet the state’s population has increased 14 percent since 2000, bringing more traffic to roads and highways. Transportation experts estimate it would take an additional \$6 billion to \$8 billion to begin to seriously address some of the committed but unfunded road projects across Tennessee.

“Safe roads and bridges are a key factor in overall highway traffic safety,” said Tim Wright with Auto Club Group/AAA Tennessee. “These are the roads that we travel on every day to go to work, to take our children to school or to run basic errands. We need to maintain these roads and bridges in a safe condition and we’ve got to have additional funding to do that.”

The coalition was launched to educate the public and state legislators as it seeks an increase and reform in Tennessee’s transportation fees. The coalition include businesses, residents, community leaders, public officials and organizations that are interested in continuing Tennessee’s transportation infrastructure for the long haul.

The group intends to work closely with Gov. Bill Haslam and the Tennessee state legislators moving forward in hopes that they will find a long-term solution in 2016.

“It is our hope that a permanent solution to our state’s transportation funding crisis can be found,” Alcorn said.

For more information or to join the Transportation Coalition of Tennessee, visit its website at www.TransportationCoalitionTN.org.

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