



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 Upper East Tennessee area include:

- SR 126 (Memorial Drive) in Kingsport-Sullivan County. TDOT proposed to widen a 4.1-mile section of SR 126 from East Center Street in Kingsport to East of Cook’s Valley Road at an estimated cost for right of way and construction of \$48.6 million. This section of roadway has a history of high crashes and had an average daily traffic of around 16,000 vehicles. Sections of the roadway will be widened to four lanes, some three lanes and part on an improved two-lane.
- Interchange of I-26 and SR 354 in Johnson City-Washington County. TDOT proposes to reconstruct this busy interchange by acquiring additional right of way, and reconstruction is at an estimated cost of \$12.8 million. The current traffic on I-26 is around 60,000 vehicles/day, and SR 354 carries around 19,000 vehicles/day.
- Hawkins County. TDOT proposes to reconstruct a 5.3-mile section of SR 66 beginning at the intersection of US 11E in Bulls Gap and extending to south of Speedwell Road/Old Highway 66. The estimated right of way and construction cost is \$32.4 million, and the average daily traffic is around 6,000 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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