

FLOOD EDITION

May 18, 2010

A daily roundup of recent news stories and opinion pieces about Tennessee transportation, water and flood control infrastructure

For the full story, click the headline or use the link.

[Study Shows Losses From I-40 And US 64 Rock Slides \(Associated Press\)](#)

A study on major rock slides that closed sections of Interstate 40 in western North Carolina and U.S. 64 in southeastern Tennessee increased transportation costs in the region by \$197 million. An Appalachian Regional Commission e-mail Monday said the study it commissioned also shows that revenue decreased by as much as 80 percent for some affected hotels, motels, and inns. Some restaurant and retail business fell by as much as 90 percent. The study by HDR-Decision Economics focused on transportation costs to the region. The Oct. 25 rock slide in Haywood County, N.C., closed a section of I-40 near the Tennessee border. The Nov. 10 slide in Polk County, Tenn., closed a section of U.S. 64. The affected sections are now open.

<http://content.usatoday.net/dist/custom/gci/InsidePage.aspx?cld=tennessean&sParam=33555123.story>

[Herron: Inspect Exempt Dams \(Jackson Sun\)](#)

Lawmaker says step is needed to 'protect human life' State Sen. Roy Herron asked authorities Monday to inspect all of the state's high-hazard dams that are no longer regulated by the state due to an exemption provided in state law. Herron, D-Dresden, said he was told the state has 70 high-hazard, non-federal dams not being inspected due to exemptions allowed in the Safe Dams Act of 1973. Eight of those dams are in West Tennessee, 49 in Middle Tennessee and 13 in East Tennessee. A high-hazard rating means people would likely die if the dam fails. Many of the 70 dams qualify for what is known as a farm-pond exemption, which discontinues state inspections after a certain amount of time. The exemption applies if the dam is used for conservation, recreation or agriculture by the owner and is closed to the public. A "farm pond" can be any size or hazard category, and it is not inspected by the state for safety.

<http://www.jacksonsun.com/article/20100518/NEWS01/5180306/1002/Herron--Inspect-exempt-dams>

[Ocoee Flume Repair Must Wait For Rock Work \(Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Sohns\)](#)

Although rafting companies on the Ocoee River increasingly are concerned that TVA might have to close the river to rafting while repairing its rock slide-damaged flume, the agency says keeping the river open is a top priority -- right behind the No. 1 priority of safety. "It may be that we revert to the old schedule of closing the river on Tuesdays and Wednesdays" and work on repairs then, Tennessee Valley Authority spokesman Travis Brickey said. That plan would suit rafters, who are struggling this spring after a late start, thanks to last year's rock slide that closed U.S. Highway 64 and this spring's cool weekends and chilled economy. "It would be a catastrophe for us now for TVA to shut the river down in the summer" for flume work, said Jerry Hamby, owner of Lake Ocoee Inn and Marina and Ocoee Inn Rafting. On May 28, a new rock slide smashed about 70 feet of TVA's historic, wooden flume that carries water to the Ocoee River hydropower generators. With the flume out, the river is flowing freely again.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2010/may/18/ocoe-flume-repair-must-wait-for-rock-work/>

[Memphis' Rail Growth Threatens Chicago's Position As No. 1 Hub \(CA/Downs\)](#)

Memphis' growth as a major rail hub is getting Chicago city leaders and Illinois politicians to launch an ambitious program to remove rail transportation bottlenecks. Seems that while Memphis was busily investing in rail, Chicago wasn't. As a consequence, shippers who want efficient service increasingly look south. "We saw competition emerging from Memphis and looked at a potential loss of 17,000 jobs and \$2 billion in economic activity a year," said Joseph Clary, who recently stepped down as director of public and intermodal transportation for the Illinois Department of Transportation. "I can't tell you how much I smile when I hear that," said Dexter Muller, vice president for community development at the Memphis Regional Chamber. "They used to say Chicago spilled more product than Memphis carried." Memphis business and civic leaders began marketing the Bluff City as a freight hub and logistics center in 1979, but real growth really began only about 12 years ago.

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/may/18/citys-rail-growth-threatens-chicago/>

[Cumberland Ave. project moves into next phase \(VolunteerTV.com\)](#)

The goal of The Cumberland Avenue Streetscape Project is to accommodate pedestrians, bikers, and access for public transit, businesses and emergency vehicles by developing a three-lane street sections with two through lanes and a center turn lane, in addition to wider sidewalks. Now, the project moves into the detailed design phase, which is expected to take about a year to complete, and which must be completed before construction can begin. You can get more information about the project by visiting the [Cumberland Connection blog](#).
<http://www.volunteertv.com/home/headlines/93966934.html>

FLOOD NEWS

[After Tenn. Floods, Wet Ground Leads To Mudslides \(Associated Press\)](#)

The floodwaters have receded in Tennessee, but in some places the saturated earth has begun to give way, causing mudslides that have blocked roads and damaged parks and homes. Paul Jefferson was at home with his wife and their 9-month-old daughter two weeks ago when a mudslide broke a stone retaining wall in their backyard and then crashed into the bedroom of their west Nashville home. It also toppled a tree that crashed through their roof. The Tennessean reports that statewide mudslides have damaged 20 roads after the recent heavy rains that flooded parts of Middle and West Tennessee. There is no statewide count of how many homes have been damaged, but Metro Nashville Councilwoman Emily Evans said that in west Nashville alone, at least five homes have been hit. And the slides could continue until the ground dries out, Assistant State Geologist Mike Hoyal said. Jefferson and his family are camping out in the dining room while they try to clean up and repair.

<http://content.usatoday.net/dist/custom/gci/InsidePage.aspx?cld=tennessean&sParam=33553825.story>

[Metro Plans Buyouts For Flood-Damaged Homes \(Tennessean/Rau\)](#)

Metro officials are working on a plan that would allow the government to buy damaged homes under a federal program the city had been using to clear flood-prone areas. Working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the city will submit a list of flood-damaged homes that may be eligible to be purchased under the federal hazard mitigation program. But Sonia Harvat, spokeswoman for Metro Water Services, which has administered the program, cautioned that it was too soon to know which homes would be eligible for the buyout program. Before this month's historic flooding, Metro had taken advantage of the FEMA buyout program to purchase 54 homes over the last five years in areas that have persistent problems with flooding. Harvat pointed out that those 54 homes all would have been subject to serious flood damage had the city not taken advantage of the buyout program. Mayor Karl Dean has been working on developing an aggressive buyout program for the last 10 days, according to his spokeswoman Janel Lacy.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100518/NEWS0202/5180335>

[Alexander, Corker Tour Millington Areas Hit By Flooding \(C. Appeal/Mckenzie\)](#)

Following a tour of flood recovery efforts in Millington on Monday, Tennessee's two U.S. senators were the guests of honor at a city hall meeting where all levels of government and volunteers found praise. Republican Sens. Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker joined in complimenting federal, state and local government responses to flooding that struck Middle and West Tennessee with torrential rains that began April 30. Alexander called it the worst natural disaster in the U.S. since the Obama administration took office in 2009. One of the reasons it didn't make as much national news as some other past disasters did "is that from Middle Tennessee all the way down to the Mississippi River, Tennesseans were helping each other and cleaning up, instead of looting and complaining," he said. In contrast to the criticism that the Federal Emergency Management Agency drew after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, Alexander and others gave the agency high marks for its response in Tennessee.

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/may/17/alexander-corker-tour-millington-areas-hit-flooding/>

[Business Recovery Center Opens \(Leaf Chronicle\)](#)

The Clarksville Area Chamber of Commerce is now hosting a Business Recovery Center for flood victims who need help from the U.S. Small Business Administration. SBA announced its opening of a Business Recovery Center in Clarksville to assist business owners affected by the recent severe storms, flooding, high winds and tornadoes that began on April 30. The Center is in the Chamber office above Green Bank, 25 Jefferson St., and is open Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. SBA's customer service representatives are available at the center to answer questions and provide one-on-one assistance with completing applications. SBA is separately assisting businesses that were storm victims, with low-interest disaster loans. Businesses and nonprofit organizations of any size may borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory, and other business assets.

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/article/20100518/NEWS01/5180318/1002/Business-Recovery-Center-opens>

[Perry County Flood Victims Waiting For Help \(WSMV-TV Nashville\)](#)

County Officials Still Assessing Damage It's hard to believe the calm creeks and rivers of Perry County caused the waves that run in every room of Courtnie Daniel's home. Daniel and her husband are newlyweds of seven months and were just beginning life in their home when waters rose at least 2 feet inside during mid-state flooding at the start of May. "All of our appliances were new because they were gifts from the wedding," she said. "So it was just a shock." The couple is staying with Daniel's mother since their home is a complete loss, as are about 150 homes across the county. The Qualls family lived in another home. The father and daughter were killed in the floods when he swam into the current to save her. According to some city leaders, more than 100 driveways are destroyed, dozens of county and state roads are severely damaged and many residents are still waiting for help. "We were just kind of waiting. You know, we really didn't know what to do," said Daniel.

<http://www.wsmv.com/weather/23581970/detail.html>

[Odom Wants Tax Break for Flood Victims \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

A new proposal before the state legislature would exempt flood victims in Tennessee from paying sales tax on replacement items. House Democratic Leader Gary Odom is working out the details this week. More than 28,000 Tennesseans have applied for disaster assistance with FEMA. For those who qualify for the federal help, Rep. Gary Odom of Nashville wants them to get a sales tax exemption too. His idea exempts homeowners replacing appliances and purchasing building materials from paying sales tax on those items. Odom says the taxes wouldn't have come in to the state were it not for the flood. To pay for the tax break, Odom is proposing to draw from the state's reserve fund. The Senate Finance Committee has already approved another flooding tax break that would benefit Opryland's rebuilding efforts. Nearly all of the state sales tax would be waived for businesses – such as Opryland – that suffer damage in excess of \$50 million.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17724>

[House Minority Leader Odom Proposes Sales Tax Exemption For Flood Victims \(NBJ\)](#)

Additional government incentives for flood victims could become part of the state's budget for the year beginning July 1 under a proposal put forth by House Minority Leader Gary Odom, D-Nashville. The proposal — which Odom aide Skip Cauthorn said is being finalized today — would give flood victims a tax exemption on the purchase of appliances and building materials. Those who qualify for FEMA assistance would also qualify for the tax exemption, according to a news release. Cauthorn said the proposal will be presented as an amendment to this year's "technical corrections bill," which makes annual revisions to Tennessee's tax code. The technical corrections bill is still in committee at the state Legislature. In acknowledgement of the state's budget crunch, Odom is arguing that the tax exemption will not have a negative impact on the state's finances because the purchases would not have taken place if the flooding had not occurred.

<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2010/05/17/daily4.html?surround=lfm>

[Corps Of Engineers Facing Questions \(Tennessean/Cass\)](#)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers faced more questions Monday about its role in the flood that struck Nashville and Middle Tennessee two weeks ago. U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper said the flood might have been a "man-made disaster" as well as a natural one. Meanwhile, flood victims and community organizers in a working-class East Nashville neighborhood demanded that Corps officials answer for their actions, especially water releases from dams along the Cumberland River. "Was the Corps at fault, or was anyone at fault?" Cooper said in a speech to the Rotary Club of Nashville. "That's a big question." The congressman joined U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander in calling for an investigation into the Corps' decisions before and during the storms to examine ways to prevent such widespread flood damage in the future. He said after the speech that he also was concerned about the Corps' coordination with the National Weather Service as the heavy rains raised river levels.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100518/NEWS02/5180334/Corps+of+Engineers+facing+questions>

[Congressman Joins Call to Investigate How Dams Managed Flood \(WPLN-Radio\)](#)

Nashville Congressman Jim Cooper is joining the call for a federal investigation into how the Army Corps of Engineers handled rising floodwaters at its dams. Earlier this month Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander said Congress should examine whether the corps could've prevented more damage from the flood. In a speech in downtown Nashville today, Cooper agreed, saying it's worth asking whether the Corps should've acted differently. "This is not a blame game," Cooper said, adding Congress may find the Corps managed the situation appropriately.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17729>

[Cooper: Was The Flood Manmade? \(City Paper\)](#)

With plenty of questions still unanswered two weeks after Nashville's historic flood, U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper on Monday said he supports U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander's call for an investigation to examine crucial decisions leading up to the disaster. "We need to get the facts," Cooper said. "We need to make sure this never happens again." Making a slideshow presentation to members of the Rotary Club of Nashville, Cooper posed the question: Was this a manmade disaster? Stopping short of answering the question directly, Cooper said one school of thought suggests it was not. After all, no one anticipated the record level of rain collected by the 42 Tennessee counties officially authorized as disaster areas by the federal government. Then again, Cooper continued, the National Weather Service failed to register an accurate forecast, demonstrated poor coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and most troubling of all, no one was warned of the degree of flooding that could occur.

<http://nashvillecitypaper.com/content/city-news/cooper-was-flood-manmade>

[Flood Cleanup Is Big Business in Tennessee \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

This month's flooding gave disaster restoration companies more work than they could handle and has attracted crews from as far away as New Hampshire. Two of the bigger corporate players are based here in Tennessee. ServiceMaster Clean is headquartered in Memphis. A local franchise in Clarksville is pressure washing the last of the river grime off the concrete floors of a home health business on Riverside Drive. Daniel Duncan is co-owner and says gutting and then drying out a building is something that needs to be done right. "Somebody has to clean this stuff up, and it might as well be a professional as opposed to anybody else." SERVPRO, based in Gallatin, has called in 300 crews from all over the country and completed 1,700 jobs so far. They're drying out buildings as large as The Pinnacle in downtown Nashville and some as small as a ranch home in Whites Creek, where Dennis Allen is getting a crew started. They've put in 16-hour days since the historic rainfall.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17689>

[The Flood The Media's Radar Missed \(Washington Post\)](#)

The reasons are more complicated -- and troubling -- than Music City's distance from the big media centers. Downtown Nashville was unfortunate enough to be under water while the news business was grappling with two other dramatic stories: the attempted bombing in Times Square and the massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/17/AR2010051700752.html>

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