

FLOOD EDITION

May 19, 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.

[I-24 Sinkhole Forces Detour In Se Tennessee \(Associated Press\)](#)

Tennessee highway officials say a 13-mile stretch of eastbound Interstate 24 between Chattanooga and Nashville will be shut down for several days after a large sinkhole opened up in the roadway in Grundy County. Traffic is being diverted onto Highway 41 as engineers assess the hole that is 40 feet long and 25 feet deep. Motorists complained about delays of up to two hours. Officials told WTVF-TV that on Tuesday morning a tractor-trailer barely missed the sinkhole and swerved into the median. They said they hope to have the road repaired by the end of the weekend and blamed heavy rains. The interstate flows eastward into Georgia at Chattanooga and westward into Kentucky at Clarksville. No one was reported injured.

<http://content.usatoday.net/dist/custom/gci/InsidePage.aspx?cld=tennessean&sParam=33561321.story>

[Sinkhole Closes I-24 \(Tennessean/Young\)](#)

A huge sinkhole has opened on Interstate 24 East between Chattanooga and Nashville. Tennessee Department of Transportation crews are there trying to determine how deep the hole goes before ending in solid rock. The interstate has been closed since about 8 a.m. So far, no one with the state knows when it could reopen. Tennessee Department of Transportation spokeswoman Jennifer Flynn said eastbound traffic is being rerouted around the sinkhole, which is in northern Grundy County near the Coffee County line. The Tennessee Highway Patrol is assisting. Motorists are getting off the interstate at Exit 114, about 12 miles before the sinkhole, and getting back on at the Pelham/Winchester exit at mile marker 127. Flynn says the sinkhole is about 25 feet deep, 40 feet wide and 18 feet long. No one was injured.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100518/NEWS01/100518058/1001/news/Sinkhole+closes+I-24>

[Sinking Detours Motorists \(Chattanooga Times Free-Press/South\)](#)

A gaping hole across the eastbound lanes of Interstate 24 could have been a tragedy, but instead it's just another major inconvenience for motorists caused by a natural geographic phenomenon, state officials said. Sometime around 8 a.m. CDT Tuesday a nearly two-foot-thick slab of asphalt highway gave way, opening a massive 500-square-foot hole that is 25 feet deep, according to the Tennessee Department of Transportation. At that time of day, right at the Grundy-Coffee County line, it was only a matter of time before cars fell into the hole, but fortunately just one vehicle suffered minor damage and the driver was able to move away, said Ray Rucker, TDOT regional maintenance supervisor. State officials said that's because transportation department employee David Shelton just happened to be heading to a job site in Franklin County when he spotted an 18-wheeler just barely make it past the hole before the last bit of asphalt fell into the pit.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2010/may/19/sinking-detours-motorists/>

[Sen. Herron Wants Tennessee Hazardous Dams Inspected \(Associated Press\)](#)

State Sen. Roy Herron wants authorities to begin inspecting dams that are considered "high hazard" but currently exempt from inspection. The Jackson Sun reports dams are given the high hazard rating when people are likely to die if they fail. Many of those dams qualify for something called a farm pond exemption, although a "farm pond" can be any size or hazard category. The exemption was written into the 1973 Tennessee Safe Dams Act after the Farm Bureau lobbied for it. Tennessee is the only state in the country with the exemption. There are 70 high-hazard dams across the state that are exempt from inspection: eight in West Tennessee, 49 in Middle Tennessee and 13 in East Tennessee. All told, Tennessee has more than 500 dams of different hazard categories that are exempt from regulation. Herron, D-Dresden, said he met Monday with representatives from the Tennessee Farm Bureau, the state's Safe Dams Program and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation.

<http://content.usatoday.net/dist/custom/gci/InsidePage.aspx?cld=tennessean&sParam=33561279.story>

[Study: Rock Slides Added \\$197m In Costs \(Citizen-Times\)](#)

Rock slides that shut down two mountain roadways in North Carolina and Tennessee this fall [cost](#) businesses and taxpayers \$197 million beyond money spent on repairs, a study released Monday said. The findings underscore the economic importance of roads, commission spokesman Louis Segesvary said.

"Infrastructure is critical to economic development of the Appalachian region, and good roads are a critical feature of that infrastructure," Segesvary said.

<http://www.citizen-times.com/article/20100518/NEWS/305180027>

FLOOD NEWS

[AUDIO FEATURE: Cheatham County Recovery A Step Behind Nashville](#)

Rescue operations in the state have now been limited to Davidson and Cheatham counties. Both areas continue to deal with the high waters of the Cumberland River. Near Ashland City, search parties are taking to the water in boats making sure everyone's accounted for.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17226>

[FEMA Aid Tops \\$100 Million \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

FEMA says it has given out \$100 million just two weeks after deadly historic flooding devastated homes and businesses in Tennessee. Most of the money – \$90 million – has gone to helping residents with rent and home repairs. Comparatively, FEMA has approved only \$640,000 in small business loans, so far. FEMA says 2,600 hundred people have gone to one of its Disaster Recovery Centers. Three new centers just opened this week. Maury, Rutherford, and Wilson County residents now have access to the centers that are open from 7 am – 7 pm, seven days a week. If you are a victim of the floods and live in one of the 42 counties declared a federal disaster area, you can register for assistance at 800-621-FEMA, or online at www.disasterassistance.gov.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17744>

[Recovery Center Welcomes Victims \(Daily News Journal\)](#)

FEMA sets up disaster location in Smyrna The best way to handle applications submitted to FEMA is to deal with a representative face to face, the manager of the newly-opened federal Disaster Recovery Center said. Located at 120 Enon Springs Road East, the center opened at 7 a.m. Tuesday in the space previously occupied by Smyrna Police Department. Site manager Lester Swartz said though no one was waiting on doors to open, people started coming by to file claims an hour later. "We've had a steady flow of people to show up today," he said around lunch time. "It's still only the first day, so many people may not know we're here." Swartz said it's likely many people have registered by phone, but they are still able to come to the center and check the status of their claim. "We really urge people to come in. When you talk to people over the phone, there can be some miscommunication. With something like this, face-to-face interaction is always better," he said. "If there's something missing that's holding up the process, we can tell you exactly what that is and you can bring it directly to us."

<http://www.dnj.com/article/20100519/NEWS01/5190309/1002/Recovery+Center+welcomes+victims>

[Recovery Centers Set Up In West Tennessee \(Jackson Sun\)](#)

Centers answer residents' questions, take applications for storm aid Humboldt resident Lois Ann Scott spent part of Tuesday afternoon seeking information about federal aid for flood damage at a center set up in Jackson by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Scott's home received damage, and her truck, caked in mud, is a total loss from floodwaters that hit May 1 and 2. She stopped by the Disaster Recovery Center in the former West Forest Family Medical Center, at 779 W. Forest Ave. "(The flood) did stop, but it did so much damage," Scott said. "I thank God that I just lost my truck, some clothes and furniture, but it could have been my life. I'm just praying to get some help and some reimbursement." Disaster Recovery Centers offer help to people affected by this month's severe storms and flooding. Other centers in West Tennessee are at the Dyersburg Mall, Gibson County Fairgrounds, Haywood County Parks and Recreation Building and Selmer Community Center. They are open each day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. until further notice.

<http://www.jacksonsun.com/article/20100519/NEWS01/5190306/1002/Recovery-Centers-set-up-in-West-Tenn>.

[Flood Victims May Get Tax Relief \(Tennessean/Sisk\)](#)

Administrative concerns could be a kink in plan to give further help to FEMA aid recipients. Flood victims might get some relief from sales taxes on items they need to rebuild, as lawmakers continued to jockey over the state budget. A proposal introduced Tuesday would waive sales taxes on purchases of major appliances and residential building supplies by people whose homes were damaged in the flood earlier this month. But some lawmakers and a senior official in Gov. Phil Bredesen's administration said they had not decided whether to support the idea because they weren't sure how to limit the exemption to flood victims. "Obviously all of our hearts go out to everyone that has a home that had losses," Finance Commissioner Dave Goetz said. "But there are administrative complexities around that (proposal) that we'd have to understand." The proposal is sponsored by House Democratic Leader Gary Odom, D-Nashville, and state Sen. Douglas Henry, D-Nashville.
<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100519/NEWS0201/5190360/Flood+victims+may+get+tax+relief>

[Some Lawmakers Call For Investigation Of Water Releases \(WSMV-TV Nashville\)](#)

Sen. Mike Turner: Flooding May Have Been Preventable. State Rep. Mike Turner, whose district includes the Donelson, Opryland area, doesn't doubt that the record rainfall on May 1 and May 2 contributed to the historic flooding in Nashville. However, he also leaves open the possibility that the Army Corp Of Engineers could have made the flooding worse by forcing water on Nashville. "That's because the Corp Of Engineers didn't maintain the Wolf Creek Dam and other dams up river, that they possibly had to release water on us that was unnecessary," said Turner. A meeting was held Tuesday night at McGavock High School to help flood victims in the Donelson area get the help they need. Turner hosted the community meeting. FEMA and the Small Business Administration were also there to explain what federal funds are available.
<http://www.wsmv.com/news/23602285/detail.html>

[Nashville Faces \\$200 Million In Water, Sewer System Damages \(Nash Biz Journal\)](#)

Damages to Nashville's water and sewer system total \$200 million, according to credit analysis released Tuesday by Standard & Poor's. Metro government also expects to lose \$3.9 million in hotel and motel revenues over six months and has allocated \$10 million for debris cleanup, according to credit analyst Sarah Smaardyk. The information was included in a report that summarized damages to 16 Tennessee cities and counties affected by flood damage earlier this month. Standard & Poor's will not alter its credit ratings on any of the local governments. "Any decline in assessed value or sales tax revenue is expected to be temporary and will be more than offset by federal funding," the report states. Damage estimates are based on figures provided by city and county officials, Smaardyk said. Most costs will be reimbursed, according to the report. In the case of Nashville, unreimbursed costs are expected to total \$3 million for general government and \$25 million for Metro Water Services.
<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2010/05/17/daily18.html?surround=lfm>

[Flood Victims Wait To See If They Can Rebuild In Same Spot \(Wkrn-Tv Nashville\)](#)

Many people in Nashville still do not know if they can keep their property to rebuild. People in the Pennington Bend area in Donelson are waiting on Metro for answers. Phyllis McLeroy and her husband Charlie had some flooding at their home before, but never like this. McLeroy said, "We know we're in a flood plain, and this is the first time the water has gotten to the upper level in our house." The McLeroy's home on Pennington Bend Road backs directly onto the Cumberland River. It's been home for 35 years, but now they're not sure if they're going to be able to rebuild there. McLeroy said, "We're in that group of people who may not be able to rebuild, and they're going to do an in depth assessment." Tuesday night, the couple took their questions to a meeting at McGavock High School, hosted by Representative Mike Turner.
<http://www.wkrn.com/global/story.asp?s=12504900>

[Laura Bush Praises Nashville's Heart \(Tennessean/Bliss\)](#)

'Figure out how you can help,' former first lady urges. Darlene Baney had one question for Laura Bush. "Can I have a hug?" the 70-year-old Red Cross volunteer asked. The former first lady responded with a warm embrace. Baney was among dozens of flood workers stationed at the Red Cross' Disaster Relief Operations Headquarters on Tuesday. Bush, who was in Nashville to sign her new book, Spoken from the Heart, visited them at Madison's Skyline Medical Center to thank the volunteers for their efforts. "You didn't get that much national attention because there were so many local people who were so helpful who immediately went around to help their neighbors," Bush said. "So I want to commend you for that." In a room crammed with laptop-covered tables and overflowing with activity, she stopped at each command post, learning the function of everything from bulk distribution to disaster mental health services..
<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100519/NEWS01/5190371/Laura+Bush+praises+Nashville+s+heart>

[Former First Lady Praises Red Cross Volunteers \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

Former First Lady Laura Bush visited the Red Cross Disaster Relief Headquarters in Madison today to thank volunteers for their service in the wake of this month's flooding. Bush praised that outpouring of aid in Tennessee, comparing it to relief efforts following gulf-coast hurricanes, which often draw lots of help from out-of-state. But Bush says Tennessee's case isn't exactly the same. "One of the things that's really different about this disaster is a lot of your volunteers, 70 percent, are Tennessee Red Cross volunteers." The Red Cross has seen over 3 thousand volunteers, doing everything from answering phones to helping flood victims find shelter to counseling the bereaved.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17783>

Opinion

[Rail Proves Its Worth \(Commercial Appeal\)](#)

Investing in Memphis railroad facilities has raised the status of the industry in national circles. Yes, it can be a pain waiting for the train, but the inconvenience has an upside: Memphis has become the envy of the railroad industry. Memphis boosters have long touted the importance of the city's five Class 1 railroads, its intermodal terminals and shipping in general. It's no accident, they say, that major railroads have invested about \$1 billion in intermodal facilities here over the last five years, making Memphis one of the country's top two or three rail-to-truck interchanges. A we-told-you-so moment arrived this week with news that the Windy City, long considered the center of the railroad world, is investing heavily to stay ahead of the Bluff City's sprawling rail yards. Joseph Clary, former director of public and intermodal transportation for the Illinois Department of Transportation, told The Commercial Appeal this week that an estimated \$2.6 billion is going into a list of projects known as the Chicago Region Environmental & Transportation Efficiency Program.

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/may/19/editorials-rail-proves-its-worth/>

[Lamar Alexander: It's Important To Ask Congress To Fund Projects \(Tennessean\)](#)

In 2007, the Corps of Engineers told me that two big flood control dams on the Cumberland River system were near failure. I asked for and Congress approved \$120 million to begin repairing Center Hill and Wolf Creek dams. During the recent flood, these repairs kept water levels higher behind these dams, which in turn kept millions of gallons out of the Cumberland River. According to the Corps, if Wolf Creek Dam had failed, flooding in Nashville would have been 4 feet higher. My \$120 million appropriation request was called an "earmark." Here is another "earmark." In 2003, 40 Clarksville community leaders visited me in Washington. They and the commander of the 101st Airborne, Gen. David Petraeus, wanted new housing for soldiers returning from Iraq. This was their top priority, but the money was not in President George W. Bush's budget. Over three years, I asked for \$196 million. Congress approved. By 2007, when the most-deployed troops in America came home, new housing was ready. Some say abolishing such earmarks will help solve Washington's out-of-control spending. I say this is a hoax, for two reasons:

<http://blogs.tennessean.com/opinion/2010/05/18/it%E2%80%99s-important-to-ask-congress-to-fund-projects/>

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