

Tennessee Infrastructure In The News

July 28, 2008

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

For the full story, click on the link below the excerpt.

Funds for Highways Plummet As Drivers Cut Gasoline Use (Wall Street Journal)

An unprecedented cutback in driving is slashing the funds available to rebuild the nation's aging highway system and expand mass-transit options, underscoring the economic impact of high gasoline prices. The resulting financial strain is touching off a political battle over government priorities in a new era of expensive oil. A report to be released Monday by the Transportation Department shows that over the past seven months, Americans have reduced their driving by more than 40 billion miles. Because of high gasoline prices, they drove 3.7% fewer miles in May than they did a year earlier, the report says, more than double the 1.8% drop-off seen in April. The cutback furthers many U.S. policy goals, such as reducing oil consumption and curbing emissions. But, coupled with a rapid shift away from gas-guzzling vehicles, it also means consumers are paying less in federal fuel taxes, which go largely to help finance highway and mass-transit systems. As a result, many such projects may have to be pared down or eliminated. http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB121721483297789245.html

State ranks in top tier of bridge structures (Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Sohn)

As the anniversary of last year's Interstate 35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis nears, Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen and transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely are touting some of the Volunteer State's "best" ratings for bridge repair and maintenance. "When it comes to keeping our bridges safe, the Tennessee Department of Transportation is leading the nation," Gov. Bredesen said in a bridge safety video released Monday during a Nashville news conference on the historic Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge. With 19,519 bridges in the state, bridge safety always has been a top priority, Gov. Bredesen said. Still, state officials don't think their efforts mean there is no room for improvement. <http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2008/jul/29/tennessee-state-ranks-top-tier-bridge-structures/?local>

Bridge repair funds needed (Tennessean/Carey)

State may borrow money instead of pay-as-you-go Lawmakers and state officials must rethink the way Tennessee pays for upgrades to its bridges, the state transportation commissioner said Monday. The state has long followed a pay-as-you-go system, not borrowing money to pay for projects, but Tennessee Department of Transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely said this practice may need to change. "We've never done bonding (for transportation spending) in Tennessee," Nicely said Monday. "I'd like to see how that works." Tennessee's bridge inspection and maintenance programs are in danger of being overtaken by rising material costs and waning repair funds. Nicely's comments came at a midday news conference just days away from the one-year anniversary of the Interstate 35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis, which killed 13 and injured 144. <http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080729/NEWS01/807290360/1001/NEWS>

State Defends Integrity of Bridges (WPLN-Radio Nashville)

One year out from the I-35 bridge collapse in Minneapolis, Tennessee transportation officials say the state's bridges are in relatively good condition. A national report released today outlines the trouble of deteriorating bridges across the country. Tennessee has the sixth lowest number of bridges deemed structurally deficient at two-and-a-half percent of its 10-thousand bridges statewide. TDOT chief engineer Paul Degges says no bridge, however, is unsafe. "If the deck on a bridge has a pothole in it, it's structurally deficient, but it's still a safe bridge. It's not going to collapse or anything like that." Degges says that in light of the Minneapolis collapse, the state has paid increased attention to metal plates that fasten different sections of a bridge together. Because of budget cuts at the state and federal level, TDOT will spend 14-million dollars less this year repairing bridges. <http://wpln.org/newstranscripts/?p=2603>

Commissioner: State's bridges in good shape (Associated Press)

As a national highway group reported that one in four bridges in the U.S. needs to be modernized or repaired, Tennessee's transportation chief said his state has the sixth lowest percentage of structurally deficient bridges in the nation. State Transportation Department Commissioner Gerald Nicely said at a news conference in Nashville on Monday that 2.4 percent of Tennessee's interstate bridges are deficient, and 4.7 percent of all the state's 19,519 bridges are classified as structurally deficient. "Our bridge inspection program is constantly cited as one of the best in the nation and was one of only three in the U.S. to complete all inspections on time in 2007, but we know there is room for improvement," TDOT Chief Engineer Paul Degges said. http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/T/TN_BRIDGES_REPORT_TENNESSEE_TNOL-?SITE=TNNAT&SECTION=US&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

Report Touts Safety Of Tenn. Bridges (WSMV-TV Nashville)

State Spends \$130 Million To Repair Bridges In Last Fiscal Year The Tennessee Department of Transportation's commissioner on Monday outlined the status and safety of Tennessee's 19,519 bridges. As of January 31, 2008, only 2.4 percent of interstate bridges in Tennessee are deficient, while 4.7 percent of all state-owned bridges are classified as structurally deficient, according to the state. That is the sixth lowest percentage of structurally deficient bridges in the nation, according to the data from the Federal Highway Administration. "Tennessee is fortunate to have one of the best transportation systems in the nation, including a first-rate bridge program," said Nicely in a press release. "We have invested more than \$1.7 billion in bridges in the last two decades and will continue that commitment into the future." <http://www.wsmv.com/news/17015817/detail.html#->

Report shows Tenn. bridges above average (WKRN-TV Nashville)

It has been almost one year since a bridge spanning the Mississippi River collapsed in Minneapolis. In the days following the collapse transportation officials across the country asked, "Could it happen here?" and embarked on ambitious inspections and repairs. Monday, Tennessee transportation leaders responded to a just-released national report on the safety of bridges in each state. Tennessee's chief road engineer said while the state did "better than most", there is still "work to be done." "There are no bridges open to traffic that are in trouble right now," said Paul Degges. "All of the bridges are safe." The report, called "Bridging the Gap", said Tennessee has the tenth most bridges among the 50 states, but the sixth fewest amount of bridge problems. So did last year's disaster Tennessee change the way Tennessee inspects bridges? When inspecting bridges, federal highway officials recommend looking at what's called "gusset plates" or plates of steel that bolt truss members together. <http://www.wkrn.com/global/story.asp?s=8748585>

TDOT Commish Outlines Status of Tennessee Bridges (WTVF-TV Nashville)

Days before the first anniversary of the fatal bridge collapse in Minneapolis, the Tennessee Department of Transportation commissioner detailed the status of the state's bridges. The collapse spurred states to examine their own infrastructure. The bridge collapse killed 13 people and injured more than 100. "Tennessee is fortunate to have one of the best transportation systems in the nation, including a first rate bridge program," said TDOT Commissioner Gerald Nicely at a press conference Monday on Nashville's historic Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge. "We have invested more than \$1.7 billion in bridges in the last two decades and will continue that commitment into the future." He said that as of Jan. 31, 2008, only 2.4 percent of the state's interstate bridges are deficient. Almost 5 percent of all state-owned bridges are classified as structurally deficient. That could mean anything from having a pothole to requiring major construction. <http://www.newschannel5.com/Global/story.asp?S=8748945>

Report finds 50 area bridges faulty (Commercial Appeal/Locker)

But no cause for driver concern, TDOT says The Tennessee Department of Transportation issued its newest report on the state's 19,569 public bridges Monday: 24 state-owned bridges and 26 locally owned bridges in Shelby County are rated "structurally deficient" by state bridge inspectors. Two of the bridges are on interstate highways: the I-240 westbound bridge over Kerr Avenue just south of the South Parkway junction, and the I-40/240 eastbound bridge over Sam Cooper Boulevard in East Memphis. But that's no cause for concern by motorists, TDOT says. "Structurally deficient" sounds ominous, but it essentially means that a bridge needs rehabilitation work or is eligible for replacement. "If we feel there is any threat at all to the public, we will close a bridge immediately," TDOT spokeswoman Julie Oaks said. TDOT Commissioner Gerald Nicely and Chief Engineer Paul Degges walked onto Nashville's Shelby Street Pedestrian Bridge over the Cumberland River for a press conference to release the agency's newest status report on Tennessee bridges. <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2008/jul/29/report-finds-50-area-bridges-faulty/>

3 Sullivan County bridges on TDOT's structurally deficient list (Times News)

Tennessee transportation officials announced Monday that nearly 5 percent of state bridges are structurally deficient. According to the Tennessee Department of Transportation, 2.4 percent of interstate bridges across the Volunteer State are deficient, while 4.7 percent of all state bridges have some sort of damage but are still structurally sound. Those figures qualify Tennessee bridges as sixth in the United States for the least number of structurally deficient bridges. In a report of bridges in Sullivan, Hawkins, Hancock and Washington counties, TDOT information shows 57 bridges, or 6.6 percent, of state and locally maintained bridges are structurally deficient. "The structurally deficient term means that the bridge may be damaged or deteriorated but not necessarily to a critical point where safety is an issue," said Julie Oaks, TDOT public information officer. <http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9007426>

Red River bridge rates low in report (Leaf Chronicle)

Gholson bridge also listed as 'deficient' The Lynwood Tarpley Memorial Bridge over the Red River, built in 1931, is among of the worst-rated bridges on a state hit list released Monday. The state-owned bridge, which carries the northbound lanes of Wilma Rudolph Boulevard, received a sufficiency rating of only 29.1, by far the worst rating of any bridge in the county. Local TDOT construction project manager David Edmondson said Monday that work to replace the bridge and its 1969 southbound counterpart with a new seven-lane bridge could begin in late spring 2009. That date could be delayed, though, as construction funds have not yet been authorized, said B.J. Doughty, TDOT spokeswoman. Preliminary engineering and right-of-way have been taken care of. An earlier estimate put the construction start date in late 2009 or early 2010. <http://www.theleafchronicle.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080729/NEWS01/807290332/1002>

Work begins on guardrail replacement (Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Crisp)

Work has begun on a \$400,000 replacement of the rusted, dented and unsightly steel box beam guardrail on U.S. 27 between the Olgiati Bridge and Signal Mountain Boulevard. The night-time repair work started Friday, and contractors on the project have about 30 days to replace the guardrail with cement barriers, Tennessee Department of Transportation officials say, though the work is moving ahead of schedule. "The old steel guardrail served its purpose, but it is definitely time to replace it with something newer," said TDOT Regional Director Bob Brown. "We are very pleased that this project is under way and look forward to its completion." Repair work starts around 8 p.m. each day and TDOT is warning motorists of the lane closures, which will last for at least a few more weeks. The work is going to cause traffic slowdowns and some congestion, though the night-time schedule is meant to reduce those delays, officials said.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2008/jul/29/chattanooga-work-begins-guardrail-replacement/?local>

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