

Tennessee Infrastructure In The News

December 7, 2009

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.

Getting there from here (Chattanooga Times Free-Press/Higgins)

People who operate businesses along U.S. Highway 411 are used to motorists stopping to ask directions. But since a big chunk of Polk County's Little Frog Mountain tumbled onto U.S. Highway 64, more wayward motorists than ever are needing reassurance. In turn, the locals know the back roads that can cut miles and minutes off the official bypass route on Tennessee Highway 68 or Georgia's portion of U.S. Highway 76 through Blue Ridge, Ellijay and Chatsworth...The recommended Tennessee detour follows state Highway 68 between U.S. 411 at Madisonville and Copperhill. Tracy Morgan and her husband, Ashley, operate the Hiwassee Corner Market at the intersection of state Route 68 and U.S. 411. They say they get plenty of drivers looking for a way around the rock slide. "In here one night, it was fifteen after ten, and some people came in. They were lost," Mrs. Morgan said. "They were trying to get to Helen, Ga." But locals on the north end take state Route 310 at Etowah to Highway 68 at Tellico Plans.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2009/dec/06/getting-there-from-here/>

News from American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA)

Job Creation Hot Topic in Nation's Capital

With continued high national unemployment rates, the White House December 3 hosted a job creation summit to gather strategies in various sectors including transportation infrastructure. President Obama told attendees "while it's important to build highways to help now, we need to remember we need a cleaner transportation system for our future." In a breakout session Obama told attendees:

"Everybody in this administration acknowledges the need for infrastructure investment. There is nothing I would rather do in terms of our long-term sustained economic growth than to be able to get us back on the track where not only are we making an investment that is immediately creating jobs and profits for businesses, but that is also laying down the foundation for economic expansion.

"The tension we've been seeing is that what is good long-term may not necessarily work as an immediate, short-term stimulus. We're still getting slapped around in the recovery act for this. The term 'shovel ready'—let's be honest here, it doesn't always live up to its billing. And there's also been a tension embodied within infrastructure between the immediate maintenance—repaving a highway—which is generally more shovel ready, but may simply duplicate the needs of the past as opposed to projects that are visionary and are really going to give a big bang for the buck long term, but require some extensive planning and you know...you want to measure twice before you cut..." "Without the American people seeing this translating into job growth right now, it's hard to get them to be interested in what's happening two years down the road."

Long-time ARTBA director Doug Pitcock, President and CEO of Williams Brothers Construction in Houston, Texas, was among those ARTBA members participating in the summit.

Congressional Democratic leaders continued last week to discuss the possibility of new job creation legislation. Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) expressed an interest in using unspent funds from the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), while Republicans reportedly would prefer to use unspent money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said December 2 her committee is gathering information on ready-to-go infrastructure projects and would put together a package to send to her leadership in the coming days.

Earlier, House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) and Highway and Transit Subcommittee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) highlighted the 210,000 direct jobs created or sustained from transportation projects funded by ARRA and claimed thousands of ready-to-go infrastructure projects could create thousands more. The pair wrote Obama December 2 urging him to include transportation investment as part of any job creation package. The letter cites congressional testimony by ARTBA member Charles Gallagher, president of Illinois-based Gallagher Asphalt Corporation, noting private sector work “literally has just dried up and blown away” as evidence of the substantial demand that exists in the transportation sector.

In conjunction with the summit, the ARTBA co-chaired Transportation Construction Coalition (TCC) launched a high-profile advertising and outreach campaign calling on Congress to create jobs “now!” by passing a robust six-year highway/transit bill. Copies of all materials are available online at www.transportationconstructioncoalition.org. The American Iron and Steel Institute December 1 also sent a letter to Obama urging passage of a six-year transportation bill by early 2010. The situation is very fluid and ARTBA will keep you informed as we push for the best outcome.

Transportation Construction Coalition to Rally Industry Grassroots to “Call Congress”

Mark your calendar for Thursday, December 10 to participate in “Call Congress Day.” Organized through the Transportation Construction Coalition, this event will rally industry members from around the country to call their representatives and senators and urge passage of a robust six-year highway/transit bill as soon as possible. Details will be posted at www.artba.org and sent to members. Contact ARTBA’s Hank Webster at hwebster@artba.org or 202-289-43434 for more information.

Wall Street Tax Legislation Introduced to Pay For Infrastructure

Chairman DeFazio (D-Ore.) December 2 introduced the Let Wall Street Pay for the Restoration of Main Street Act, a bill to place a surcharge on stock and securities transactions and to use these surcharges to decrease the deficit and support pending surface transportation authorization legislation. Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) is expected to introduce similar legislation in the Senate next week.

Highway Employment Continues to Decrease

Employment in the highway, street and bridge market continued to fall in October as contractors cut their payrolls by 43,600 workers, a decrease of 12.1 percent over the same month last year according to the latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. There were 315,700 workers employed by contractors in October 2009. Overall construction employment was down 15 percent. Employment also decreased in the stone mining and quarrying, aggregates, concrete and machinery industries.

Recovery Act Payments Begin to Slow as Season Closes

State and local DOTs obligated \$1.05 billion of ARRA highway stimulus funds for highway, bridge and related projects during November and paid out \$968.5 million to contractors for construction work performed, bringing the total obligated for highway projects to \$21.1 billion or 78.4 percent of the \$26.9 billion of ARRA highway funds. There are now 5,458 ARRA-financed projects under construction, involving \$14.01 billion of ARRA funds. Demonstrating ARRA highway funds will continue to provide economic benefits, \$5.47 billion of highway stimulus funds remain to be obligated. Any funds not obligated by March 2010 must be returned to FHWA for redistribution and all funds must be obligated by September 30, 2010. For a full report on ARRA obligations, visit the Current Issues page of www.artba.org.

Source: ARTBA

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