

May 20, 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.

[Detours Urged As Sinkhole Work Continues \(Times Free-Press/Crisp\)](#)

Contractors made major progress overnight Tuesday and into Wednesday repairing the sinkhole that swallowed up nearly two lanes of eastbound Interstate 24 in Grundy County early Tuesday morning. But motorists still are facing long commutes around the hole, and relief will come only after repairs are complete this Saturday, according to the Tennessee Department of Transportation. "The contractor worked throughout the night excavating the sinkhole in an effort to reach solid rock, which they did," said TDOT spokeswoman Jennifer Flynn. "They will begin filling the hole with rock (Wednesday evening). After that it will be a matter of hauling rock and filling in the hole until they can get it to a point where they can repave it." The highway gave way to the sinkhole Tuesday morning around 8 a.m., according to TDOT. The hole is just west of the Pelham/Winchester exit and east of the Manchester exit on the Grundy-Coffee county line. Repair work is being performed by Highways Inc. at a price tag of \$266,000, TDOT officials said.

<http://www.timesfreepress.com/news/2010/may/20/detours-urged-as-sinkhole-work-continues/>

[Roane Co. Airport Wins \\$72,000 State Grant \(WVLT-TV Knoxville\)](#)

Tennessee's governor awarded a Roane County airport a grant worth several thousand dollars on Wednesday. Governor Phil Bredesen approved the \$72,000 grant for Rockwood Municipal Airport through the Tennessee Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division. The money comes from a larger aeronautics grant awarded to the state by the federal government. It will be used to repair and seal cracks around the city-owned airport. Rockwood Municipal Airport has a 5,000 foot runway and is big enough to handle planes as large as the Boeing 737. FAA figures indicate about 60 percent of its traffic is general aviation with transient and military flights making up the bulk of the rest.

<http://www.volunteertv.com/home/headlines/94386654.html>

[UT Cited With Two Violations Of State Water Pollution Standards \(NS/Ferrar\)](#)

The University of Tennessee has been cited with two violations of state water pollution control standards where a contractor is clearing land for sorority housing at Neyland Drive and Kingston Pike. The violations on Dec. 21 and May 13 were for causing water pollution in Fort Loudoun Lake under Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation standards, according to TDEC spokeswoman Tisha Calabrese-Benton. On Dec. 21, TDEC noted that water was flowing down a culvert that drains into Fort Loudoun Lake, the violation letter states. The letter asked UT to 'review the storm water pollution prevention plan and ensure that all erosion controls are installed and maintained.' The letter warns that 'violations of the Water Quality Control Act can cause civil penalties to be assessed.' The contractor's permit requires remedial action within 48 hours of becoming aware of the problem. The May 13 violation letter stemmed from a May 3 TDEC inspection and noted that water flowed out of a sediment trap onto Neyland Drive and into the storm drainage system into the lake.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/may/19/ut-cited-two-violations-state-water-pollution-stan/>

[Monitoring Water In The Smokies: Acid Levels High In Streams \(NS/Simmons\)](#)

High in the spruce-fir forest of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park lie the headwaters of Noland Creek, a remote trout stream on the park's North Carolina side that flows from Clingmans Dome to Fontana Lake. At approximately 5,500 feet above sea level, the Noland Divide watershed is the longest ongoing research site in the Southern Appalachians for monitoring acid deposition and its harmful effects on streams and soils. Hidden in the forest are rain gauges and measuring devices that have been churning out data since 1991. Air quality monitoring over the last several decades shows that the Smokies' high-elevation streams have some of the highest levels of acid contamination in the U.S. The most harmful of these pollutants - nitrates and sulfates - blow in from outside the park to form acidic rain and cloud water at the park's highest peaks.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/may/20/acid-levels-high-in-streams/>

[UT Study Finds Viruses In Untreated East Tennessee Drinking Water \(University Of Tennessee\)](#)

All of the high-risk water sources contained *E.coli*, coliforms, Bacteroides and infectious viruses. One of the low-risk water sources had *E.coli* and coliforms; half had Bacteroides; and three-quarters had infectious viruses. All of the wells and springs sampled in the study are used for public water supply, but the water is treated before being distributed, so the contamination measured in the study doesn't represent a direct risk to consumers. However, these results shed light on a potential health hazard for part of the Tennessee population.

"The real concern is for the numerous small non-community water systems and household wells, where local residents typically drink groundwater that hasn't been filtered or disinfected," McKay said. "It's likely that many of these residents are being exposed to waterborne fecal contamination, both bacterial and viral, but it isn't clear how big a health risk this represents. Local and regional research is needed to assess the health impacts."

http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-05/uota-usf051910.php

[Fluoridation Ineffective & Harmful, Studies Show \(The Sacramento Press\)](#)

A Tennessee State legislator, Joey Hensley, who is also an MD is urging all Tennessee Water Districts to stop fluoridation, reported a Tennessee ...

http://www.sacramentoexpress.com/headline/27285/Fluoridation_Ineffective_Harmful_studies_show

[Proposal Would Provide Tax Break For Flood Victims \(WTVF-TV Nashville\)](#)

Thousands of flood victims could get help with recovery through a temporary break on sales tax. State Representative Gary Odom said flood victims should get a break when it comes to paying sales taxes on major appliances and building supplies. Odom said if the state does not have the money in the budget to do that, it's time to dip into the rainy day fund. If this plan proposed passes, those affected by the flood could buy everything from freezers to refrigerators for their homes tax free. Only victims who qualify for disaster aid from the Federal Emergency Management Agency would be eligible. Lawmakers who have concerns about the plan want a system in place to make sure the people who really need the break will get it – and not those who are just trying to pay less for major appliances. If the proposal gets the green light it is expected to start five days after the budget is passed and would end on September 30. The legislature's fiscal Review Committee has been studying the proposal.

<http://www.newschannel5.com/Global/story.asp?S=12507319>

[Corps of Engineers Defends Management as Lawmakers Call for Probe \(WPLN\)](#)

More lawmakers have joined the call for an investigation into the Army Corps of Engineers' management of rivers around Nashville during this month's flooding. A new proposal sponsored by Nashville Rep. Mike Turner is advancing in the state legislature. It asks for a congressional investigation. Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander has already requested a federal hearing, and Nashville Congressman Jim Cooper is asking questions about whether some of this month's flooding was "man-made." Even as the Cumberland River was flooding parts of downtown Nashville, upstream, the Corps had to release water from Old Hickory Lake to maintain control of the dam. But some wonder why the Corps didn't lower the lake level ahead of the storms. Lt. Col. Anthony Mitchell, the Nashville district commander, says Old Hickory wasn't designed as a deep reservoir for flood water.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17837>

[TN Lawmakers Seek Probe Into Corps' Floodwater Release \(AP/Johnson\)](#)

Tennessee state lawmakers want their congressional counterparts to investigate the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' release of water during historic flooding in Middle Tennessee earlier this month. The resolution sponsored by House Democratic Caucus Chairman Mike Turner of Nashville was unanimously approved on a voice vote by the House Finance Committee on Wednesday and will be scheduled for a House floor vote. The measure urges the Tennessee congressional delegation to investigate the Corps' water releases and maintenance of dams and levees serving Tennessee and Kentucky. Dams all around Middle Tennessee took on large amounts of water during the record rainfall the weekend of May 1-2. Nashville received 13.5 inches over two days, causing lakes and rivers to swell with runoff.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100520/NEWS01/5200339/TN+lawmakers+seek+probe+into+Corps++flood+water+release>

[Cannon Co. Eligible For Aid \(Daily News Journal\)](#)

Four more Tennessee counties, including Cannon, have been approved for federal assistance as a result of recent flooding. Cannon, Giles and Marshall counties have been approved in both the individual and public assistance categories. Wednesday's announcement brings the number of counties approved for both individual and public assistance to 45 and adds Pickett County in the public assistance category. For public assistance projects that are eventually approved, FEMA will pay 75 percent of the cost. The remaining 25 percent is split between the state and local government. These projects may include such things as debris removal, emergency services related to the severe storms and flooding, and repairing or replacing damaged public facilities.

<http://www.dnj.com/article/20100520/NEWS01/5200333/1002/Cannon+Co.+eligible+for+aid>

[4 More Counties Eligible For Disaster Aid \(WSMV-TV Nashville\)](#)

Four more Tennessee counties have been approved for federal assistance as a result of severe weather that struck the state in late April and early May. Cannon, Giles and Marshall counties have been approved in both the individual and public assistance categories. Residents and business owners who sustained losses in these counties can begin applying for assistance by registering online at www.fema.gov or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Individual assistance can include grants to help pay for temporary housing, home repairs and other serious disaster-related expenses. In addition, Pickett County has been approved in the public assistance category. The designation means local governments in Pickett County are eligible to apply for federal assistance for debris removal, emergency protective measures and repairing, restoring or replacing damaged public facilities. Two of the counties announced on Wednesday, Marshall and Pickett, were not among the counties for which Gov. Phil Bredesen originally requested disaster assistance on May 3, but preliminary damage assessments conducted since the initial request led both counties to qualify.

<http://www.wsmv.com/weather/23606840/detail.html>

[Flood Damage Estimates Rise Beyond \\$2 Billion \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

The flood damage to private property in Nashville is quickly approaching \$2 billion. According to estimates released by city officials Wednesday, more than 11,000 parcels sustained some kind of damage during this month's historic rainfall. The running totals don't include public buildings and infrastructure. Those estimates are just coming out, but it is already clear Metro Water Services will take the biggest hit. The K.R. Harrington water treatment plant will cost \$40 million to fix, and that's not the department's largest expense. Director Scott Potter says the Dry Creek sewage plant is in even worse shape. "It's the waste water treatment plant in Rivergate and it was pretty much halfway completely destroyed." It will cost \$100 million to restore all of the underground tunnels and electronics at Dry Creek. Until then, sewage will only be partially treated before flowing into the Cumberland River. The total damage to the water department is estimated at \$200 million.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17832>

[Flood Damage Tops \\$1.9 Billion \(Tennessean/Rau\)](#)

11,000 private properties affected as Metro sorts out buyout plan Private property flood damage in Davidson County has eclipsed \$1.9 billion, according to information provided Wednesday by Mayor Karl Dean and top Metro officials who are working on a plan to buy out some homeowners. The record flood damaged more than 11,000 properties, and many homeowners are wondering whether the government will buy their properties. Dean said the city is working on a buyout plan, but key elements have not been determined, including how many homes might qualify and how Metro would come up with the money to pay its portion of the cost. "Seeing how the neighborhoods are impacted two weeks later really brings home that, while we have made tremendous progress due in large part to the community spirit of our city and the willingness of neighbors to help neighbors, we have a long way to go," the mayor said. "And a lot of the issues are very complicated."

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100520/NEWS0202/5200342/1001/NEWS/Flood+damage+tops++1.9+billion>

[Private Property Damage Nears \\$2 Billion \(Nashville Business Journal\)](#)

The total amount of private property damage in Davidson County resulting from historic floods two weeks ago is \$1.9 billion, Metro officials said at a news conference today. Metro government has identified 11,115 parcels sustaining damage that include 16,808 dwelling units. Mayor Karl Dean also announced "an aggressive home buyout program" that will leverage state and federal funds to condemn and purchase homes in flood ways and flood plains, with the vision of clearing parcels and incorporating them into the parks system. "The rule is if you acquire property with this buyout program, you can't put a structure on it," said Scott Potter, director of Metro Water Services. Metro Planning Director Rick Bernhardt said 530 primary structures within a floodway were damaged and 2,500 structures outside the floodway but inside the flood plain have been identified as damaged.

<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2010/05/17/daily26.html?surround=lfm>

[Private Flood Damage Estimate Climbs To \\$1.9 Billion \(City Paper/Garrison\)](#)

Private property damages from Nashville's catastrophic flood two weeks ago will cost \$1.9 billion, according to Rick Bernhardt, executive director of the Metro Planning Department. Metro's estimate comes after identifying more than 11,100 parcels throughout Davidson County that sustained property damages from Nashville's historic flood. Approximately 16,000 individual dwellings are believed to have experienced damages. "Those numbers are continuing to be refined," Bernhardt said at a news conference this morning. More than 530 damaged structures are within Nashville's floodway, a designated area in close proximity to rivers and creeks that experiences regular flooding. Another 2,500 damaged structures are outside that floodway, but within the 100-year flood plain.

<http://nashvillecitypaper.com/content/city-news/private-flood-damage-estimate-climbs-19-billion>

[FEMA To Stay In Area \(State Gazette\)](#)

As the Dyer County community transitions from emergency mode to the restoration process following the recent historic flooding of the Forked Deer River, many of the programs and initiatives of city and county officials, emergency management personnel and relief organizations will also make changes. Representatives from local to federal levels working with flood victims in the Dyer County area are concerned that as residents see emergency accommodations closing, they will feel that all aid in the area has abandoned them, as well. The Federal Emergency Management Agency has secured a place in the Dyersburg Mall to meet with area residents and guide them through the application and recovery process. As FEMA officials settle into the Disaster Recovery Center, located across from Cato, the mobile command unit parked in the mall parking lot will most likely be dispatched to another area in need of assistance. Residents should not assume that FEMA has left the area with its highly visible mobile unit. FEMA representatives will remain in the area to help those affected by the flooding indefinitely.

<http://www.stategazette.com/story/1635849.html>

[FEMA Deputy Pleased With Area's Recovery \(Leaf Chronicle\)](#)

Nearly three weeks after massive flooding in Clarksville and Montgomery County, the second man in charge at the Federal Emergency Management Agency didn't find a great deal of needs in the recovery effort. Rick Soreno, deputy administrator for FEMA, and a small group of officials from the agency visited Clarksville on Wednesday to get an update on the recovery and to view some of the flood damaged areas. "I think the big thing is we get why, it's called the Volunteer State," Soreno said. "Through these traumatic times people have shown their resilience. In talking with people who have damaged businesses and homes, it's amazing how far the recovery effort has come because of neighbor helping neighbor, and they continue to help each other." Patricia Lynn is FEMA's Disaster Recovery Center manager and oversees the center that is set up at Civic Hall in Veterans Plaza. "I need another AA (application assistant)," she said after speaking with Soreno.

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/article/20100520/NEWS01/5200302/1002/NEWS01/FEMA-deputy-pleased-with-area-s-recovery>

[Metro Still Calculating Cost Of Flood Damage To Infrastructure \(City Paper/Garrison\)](#)

Metro officials have yet to attach an overall dollar-figure to public-infrastructure damages sustained during recent flooding, but early cost assessments from individual departments appear significant. Metro Finance Director Richard Riebeling has previously said he expects the Federal Emergency Management Agency to pay for about 85 percent of city government damages. Metro will also rely partly on its self-insurance plan, which should reimburse the city for certain building and equipment repairs. Mayor Karl Dean said Wednesday the city is also allocating dollars from its 4-percent fund, which is carved out of Metro's general fund, to flood-related repairs. Under normal circumstances, money from the 4-percent fund is used for unexpected equipment repairs throughout the year.

<http://nashvillecitypaper.com/content/city-news/metro-still-calculating-cost-flood-damage-infrastructure>

[Metro Making Final Decisions On Home Buyout Program \(City Paper/Garrison\)](#)

As thousands of Nashvillians assess flood losses to their homes, Metro officials are finalizing details of an aggressive buyout program whereby damaged homes susceptible to future flooding would be purchased and torn down by the government. Under the plan, the Federal Emergency Management Agency would pay 75 percent of the cost to purchase damaged homes within Nashville's floodway, which refers to the designated area in immediate proximity to waterways that experiences regular flooding. The Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and Metro would each pay 12.5 percent of costs. Government officials would also consider purchasing excessively damaged homes that fall within the city's much broader 100-year floodplain. The financial sum given to a homeowner would equal the property value appraisal of the house assessed prior to Nashville's flood two weeks ago.

<http://nashvillecitypaper.com/content/city-news/metro-making-final-decisions-home-buyout-program>

[Nashville Home Buyouts to Start with More than 500 in Floodway \(WPLN-Radio\)](#)

The Metro Planning Department has compiled a list of more than 3,000 homes in the 100 year flood plain which sustained damage in this month's record-breaking storms. The owners have to meet certain criteria before they can begin to rebuild. If the cost to repair a home in the flood plain is less than 50% of its value, a homeowner should have little trouble getting a permit. But if damage is beyond 50%, the city is using the opportunity to buy out homeowners – paying pre-flood appraisal values – and demolishing the property. Scott Potter is director of Metro Water Services, which oversees storm water planning. "The problem that we're facing fundamentally is we didn't have storm water management in the 50s and 60s and 70s, and that's what most of the homes that were damaged were built before the rules were in place." More than 500 homes damaged by recent rains are in a so-called "floodway." Potter says his goal is to remove those structures first, but each home will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

<http://wpln.org/?p=17836>

[Nashville Under Watch For Credit Downgrade Over Flood Damage \(TN/Cass\)](#)

A top municipal credit rating agency has put Metro government on watch for a possible rating downgrade, largely because of recent flood damage. The decision, affecting \$1.87 billion in previously issued debt, "is based upon an already narrow financial position, marked by low General Fund reserves and significant tax base damage because of recent flooding which is expected to add further stress to Metro's finances," Moody's Investors Service said in a news release Wednesday. "Moody's believes that Metro's already narrow financial position will likely experience further strain due to recent flood damage and disruption of various revenue streams, including hotel/motel taxes, sales taxes and possibly property tax revenues." The agency also said, that it expects Metro's economy to "remain relatively stable over the long term" and that the city's debt levels are manageable.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100520/NEWS0202/5200346/1001/NEWS/Nashville+under+watch+for+credit+downgrade+over+flood+damage>

Opinion

[Gail Kerr: The Waters Go Down, And The Show Goes On \(Tennessean\)](#)

Block after block of houses sit empty, stripped to the bones, windows open and fans whirring — their owners are living elsewhere for now. Two-and-a-half weeks after the worst flood experienced in this lifetime, Nashville is getting back to normal. Tourists are returning. The mayor is wearing a suit again. Ruined gardens are being re-tilled. Some things are evident: • People are mostly kind. Despite the haters and the grouchers and the flame-throwers that clamor for attention, most folks in Middle Tennessee would give you the shirt off their back. Many did just that. It's been amazing to see. If you haven't been moved, your soul is an icicle. Just one example: A homeowner in one flooded neighborhood has kept the garage door open ever since the flood. Inside are stacks of supplies: bottled water, toothbrushes, bleach, rubber gloves, you name it.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100520/COLUMNIST0101/5200345/Gail+Kerr++The+waters+go+down++and+the+show+goes+on>

[Dams Need State Oversight \(Jackson Sun\)](#)

West Tennessee suffered many dam failures lately and it was to be expected after so much rain over the last week or two. Thankfully the dam problems did not kill anyone but it is a wonder that they did not. Springbrook Subdivision in Madison County lost two large privately built lakes that were contained by crude dams built by land developers around 1970. When the upper lake was built, the soil was so sandy that large wells were installed to maintain the water level for the residents or potential buyers. Generally speaking, a sandy lake bed is a bad omen for a dam because the water percolates under the dam to escape the pressure of the lake. The tragedy at Toccoa Falls, Georgia, during the Carter Administration resulted in a national inventory of dangerous dams and a new emphasis on proper construction.

<http://www.jacksonsun.com/article/20100520/OPINION02/5200319/1014/OPINION/Dams-need-state-oversight>

[Editorial: Study Flood More \(Leaf Chronicle\)](#)

U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper and U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander are both calling for an investigation into the decisions that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers made regarding dams before and during the storms that led to flooding in Middle Tennessee. Dams all around the area took on large amounts of water during the record rainfall. Although we doubt that anything could have prevented most of the flooding, given the duration and amount of rain that fell during the first weekend in May, legitimate questions are being raised concerning water releases along the Cumberland River. If anything should have been done differently, that needs to be uncovered so that the responses are not repeated in the future. Cooper said this week during a speech in Nashville that he wants an investigation of water releases and what he considers to be poor weather forecasting, weak communications and inadequate flood warnings on May 1 and 2.

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/article/20100520/OPINION01/5200304/1014/OPINION>

###