

July 23, 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.

[Flood Flubs Cost Businesses Millions, City Leaders Tell Senate \(Nashville Biz Journal\)](#)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was blasted by politicians and Nashville civic leaders during a Capitol Hill hearing this morning in Washington for its actions during historic flooding that inundated Nashville and surrounding areas the first weekend of May. The most significant problem highlighted in today's testimony were communication gaps that left officials and businesses on the ground in Nashville in the dark on how the Cumberland River was being managed throughout the flood and working with inaccurate information on how high the river would crest. The river ultimately crested at 52 feet, 12 feet above flood stage. More than 13 inches of rain fell on the region in a two-day period. "With better warning, businesses could have saved hundreds of millions of dollars in losses," Bert Mathews, chairman of the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce and president of The Mathews Co., told a U.S. Senate subcommittee.

<http://nashville.bizjournals.com/nashville/stories/2010/07/19/daily27.html?surround=fn>

[Corps of Engineers' Flood Response Hindered by Communication Errors \(WPLN\)](#)

The Army Corps of Engineers' regional commander says communication problems during the May flood will lead to changes in how the agency operates. It's standard procedure during a flood for dam engineers to share data with the National Weather service twice a day at set times. But the forecast changed quickly and repeatedly when the massive amount of rain fell on Tennessee. Both groups ended up making decisions based on old information and, in some cases, incorrect assumptions. Now, Major General John Peabody says he's developing new guidelines to make communication between the two agencies more frequent during floods. The General said the disaster also highlighted how dependent the Corps has become on the internet for internal communications. Peabody says engineers lost their primary method of sharing complicated charts of data with each other when the agency's high speed connection was down for several hours during the flood.

<http://wpln.org/?p=19407>

[Corps Admits Failure To Communicate With Weather Service \(CP/Garrison\)](#)

At Thursday's U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on Tennessee's historic flood, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers turned to a recently drafted after-action report, owning up to communication errors with the National Weather Service as the disaster unfolded. But U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper, who's been critical of the Corps' actions, likened the report to putting a "cheerful face on some really ugly facts" before pointing out some disturbing findings and even a falsehood in the report. In all, he said the Corps acknowledged 27 categories of problems in their self-analysis. "It's hard to see how the Corps could give itself any sort of passing grade," Cooper said. Gen. John Peabody, commander of the Corps division that includes Nashville, said Corps efforts reduced the Cumberland River's flood crest in Nashville by approximately five feet, a level of magnitude that could have left the city crippled in certain areas.

<http://nashvillecitypaper.com/content/city-news/corps-admits-failure-communicate-weather-service-during-flood>

[Corps Says It's Sorry, Promises Better Warning \(Tennessean/Theobald\)](#)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers took two small steps Thursday to repair its damaged image in the wake of the devastating May flooding in Tennessee. Corps Gen. John Peabody apologized during a Senate hearing and promised to do better. "I apologize to (Tennesseans) for anything the Corps did," said Peabody, commander of the Corps division that includes the Nashville district. "I can promise this: We will put in place a warning system ... that will never allow this to happen again." The hearing before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development included criticism of how the Corps managed the flow of water during the flooding and of flooding forecasts that the National Weather Service had provided during the crisis. Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Nashville, testified the Corps didn't properly notify the public it would release large amounts of water from the Old Hickory Dam during the flooding. Nashville residents were caught off guard by the rapid rise of the Cumberland River.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100723/NEWS01/7230337/Corps+says+it+s+sorry++promises+better+warning>

[Army Corps Of Engineers Admits Problems With Tenn. Flood Response \(NS/Collins\)](#)

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acknowledged Thursday problems with its response to the devastating floods that killed 22 people in Tennessee this past spring, but stressed that the heavy two-day rainfall that soaked the state was so unpredictable there is no way the agency could have been fully prepared. "Given the nature of this unprecedented weather event, flooding was unavoidable," said Maj. Gen. John Peabody, commander of the Corps' Great Lakes and Ohio River Division. The Corps and the National Weather Service have been under fire for failing to quickly recognize the potential for severe flooding in Middle and West Tennessee during the storms last May and for not acting quickly enough to alert the public about the possible danger. The Corps conceded a number of errors - including poor communication, unread e-mail from the National Weather Service, a shortage of essential personnel on duty and equipment failures - in its after-action report on the flooding, which was released in advance of a congressional hearing on the disaster Thursday.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/jul/22/corps-admits-problems/>

[Dean Says Flood Predictions Weren't Enough \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

Mayor Karl Dean says Nashville officials had to lean more on their own instincts than the predictions of weather and water experts during the May flood. Dean testified Thursday at a Senate hearing organized by Tennessee Senator Lamar Alexander. Mayor Dean says the Army Corps of Engineers didn't warn the city when it released water from dams upstream during the flood. A report prepared by the Corps shows the engineers didn't clearly inform the National Weather Service, either, so that information wasn't adequately figured into forecaster's predictions of how fast and far flood waters would rise. The city's own measurements of the Cumberland River's depth repeatedly showed the flood was outpacing the predictions. Dean says city officials asked and received new forecasts each time, but that didn't erase their worries. "By Monday afternoon, with the crest level prediction at 52.5 feet, we were extremely concerned if the projection was wrong again and the river rose to 53 feet."

<http://wpln.org/?p=19405>

[Millington Mayor Tells Committee First-Responders Made Difference \(CA/Sullivan\)](#)

Millington Mayor Richard Hodges said his "Small Town, USA" has been thrust into a national spotlight because of May flooding, but told the Senate Appropriations Committee on Thursday that it demonstrated "how intergovernmental relations work." Hodges was called to testify about lessons learned from the April 30-May 2 storms that dumped more than 20 inches of rain in Middle and West Tennessee and killed 24 people. Most of the testimony from other witnesses, including representatives of the Corps of Engineers, Tennessee Association of Broadcasters and Nashville Mayor Karl Dean, focused on the devastation in and around Nashville. The Corps released a 292-page draft "after action report" at the hearing, detailing missteps in communication during a disaster that broke going into a weekend. But Hodges talked about the 1,500 rescues made in the first day of the flooding in his town -- "the largest natural disaster ever to affect Millington," he called it -- and contrasted it with the most serious flooding prior to this year, the Christmas Day flood of 1987. Flood control work after that event had effectively held back flood waters until this year, he said.

<http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2010/jul/22/millington-mayor-tells-senate-committee-first-resp/>

[Cooper Chastises Corps of Engineers \(WPLN-Radio Nashville\)](#)

Congressman Jim Cooper had harsh words for the Army Corps of Engineers during a Senate hearing Thursday. He says lack of communication about dam releases during May's flood amounted to surprising local officials with a "water bomb." Cooper chastised the Corps for not shifting into emergency mode until midday Sunday, after several people had already died. He criticized information given to National Weather Service forecasters and local officials as being incomplete and overly complicated. And Cooper said the Corps' internal organization was shoddy. "The Corps had not read its weather service emails, determined who were essential or non essential personnel, or even established a telephone tree. I know boy scout troops that are more prepared than this." In response, the commander of the Army Corps region that includes Nashville admitted there were problems, and said the blame stops with him. But Major General John Peabody argued there was no way of being fully prepared for what the weather service is now calling a "thousand-year rainfall."

<http://wpln.org/?p=19404>

[Senator Lamar Alexander's Opening Statement At Hearing On Nashville Flood \(N-S\)](#)

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) this morning gave the following remarks as his opening statement during the hearing "Lessons from the 2010 Tennessee Flood" of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development: "There are two reasons in my view for having this hearing. The first is to remind ourselves and the nation of what a disaster this was. This is the largest natural disaster in this country since President Obama took office and FEMA tells me that it's been since 2008 that any disaster in this country has required as much money or attention as this one has. It's been overshadowed by the oil spill which is tragic but is not a natural disaster. I've heard from many people around the country—and I would say this to those who are here from Tennessee—about how proud the country is of the response Tennesseans have had to the flood. Instead of looting and complaining, Tennesseans have been cleaning up and helping each other and have made quite a name for themselves around the country in terms of response to a tragedy.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/jul/22/senator-lamar-alexanders-opening-statement-hearing/>

[Senator Bob Corker's Opening Remarks At Hearing On Nashville Flood \(N-S\)](#)

U.S. Senator Bob Corker, R-Tenn., delivered the following opening remarks today at a hearing of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee entitled, "Lessons from the 2010 Tennessee Flood." Senator Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., is a member of the committee. Corker and other members of the Tennessee congressional delegation were invited to address the committee as witnesses. "Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I very much appreciate you having this hearing. I'll certainly set the pace on brevity. Senator Bennett, I thank you for having this hearing also. As always, it's a great pleasure to serve with Senator Alexander. I really appreciate the way he is focused on this issue. I'm proud to be here with colleagues from across our state. We enjoy working with each other, and I think our state actually sets a tone for the country in our ability to work together through crises and other problems, and I think that's why the state is the way it is," said Corker. "At the first of May, Tennessee, as Senator Alexander mentioned, had the greatest natural disaster during this administration. And Tennesseans acted the way I think we all expected them to act; they helped each other.

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/jul/22/senator-bob-corkers-opening-remarks-hearing-nashvi/>

[150,000 U.S. Bridges Are Still Rated 'Deficient' \(Minneapolis Star Tribune\)](#)

Three years after I-35W disaster, Reps. Jim Oberstar and Tim Walz warn of lingering national problems. Nearly three years after the Interstate 35W bridge collapse, 25 percent of the country's bridges remain "structurally deficient" or "functionally obsolete," according to testimony at a House Transportation Subcommittee hearing Wednesday. "It's only a matter of time before it's another one in the river," said Minnesota Rep. Tim Walz, a Democrat on the committee. "Are we doing enough to have an honest discussion with the American public of what it's going to cost to replace and repair and keep our bridges up to where they need to be for safety?" The hearing examined funding levels and bridge improvements, as well as the frequency and adequacy of inspections of the nation's highway bridges.

<http://www.startribune.com/politics/98978899.html?elr=KArksLckD8EQUOaEyqyP4O:DW3ckUiD3aPc: Yyc:aUUI>

[Kentucky, Barkley Lakes Begin Drawdown \(The Leaf Chronicle\)](#)

The Tennessee Valley Authority and the U.S. Army of Corps of Engineers have begun their annual drawdown of Kentucky and Barkley Lakes and it will take several months to reach the winter pool levels. Drawdown procedures are part of the reservoir management plans to help with flood control on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers next spring. The drawdown began on July 1 and will be complete by January 1.

<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/article/20100722/COLUMNISTS11/7220314>

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