



**STATE OF TENNESSEE**  
**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

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September 5, 2007

Dear Regional Parkway Design Resource Team & Subcommittee members

Subject: Knoxville Parkway (SR-475) Project Status Update

As Project Manager for the Knoxville Parkway (SR-475) project, I am taking this opportunity to provide a brief update to the "Regional Parkway Design Resource Team" (RPDRT) on the status of the project. This update addresses the environmental process, air quality, road network and connectivity along SR-475, transportation funding, and the topic of tolling including the "SR-475 Conceptual Feasibility Study."

First, let me thank you again for taking the time to contribute to the modified Context Sensitive Solutions process. The Department deeply appreciates the hundreds of hours the team members have spent in developing recommendations to soften the impact of this project on the property owners in the immediate vicinity of its right-of-way and the communities at-large. Since Governor Phil Bredesen and Commissioner of the Department of Transportation Gerald Nicely announced the acceptance of recommendations submitted by the RPDRT, the department has been proactive in moving forward with the project development process.

## **Environmental Process**

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was signed and approved December 18, 2001. The Department of Transportation is committed to preparing a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed Knoxville Parkway in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the regulations and guidance of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the US Department of Transportation (USDOT), and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

TDOT's Environmental Division is working closely with their consultant, Parsons Transportation Group, in preparing the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) and updating all pertinent information. A projected date for approval of the SDEIS by FHWA is fall of 2008. The SDEIS will include a thorough assessment and analysis for the no-build alternative, the proposed alignment, and other public transportation alternatives. Once the Supplemental is completed, TDOT will arrange for a series of public meetings so the public will have the opportunity to review it and comment.

After the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approves the SDEIS, the document will be placed on the Knoxville Parkway website and at local libraries along the corridor just as the proposed alternates and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) were placed for public viewing and comment.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is a full disclosure document that details the process through which a transportation project is developed. The FEIS includes consideration of a range of reasonable alternatives, analyzes the potential impacts resulting from the alternatives, and demonstrates compliance with other applicable laws and Executive Orders. Once the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) accepts the FEIS, the document is circulated for review, after which the FHWA will issue a Record of Decision (ROD), which describes the basis of FHWA's decision, including identifying alternatives which were considered, and confirming the specific mitigation measures that are to be incorporated into the project.

## **Air Quality**

The SDEIS will address new Environmental Protection Agency regulations on PM 2.5 and Mobile Source Air Toxics (MSAT) published after the approval of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Since the approved DEIS did not address PM 2.5 or MSAT, FHWA requested that the air quality analysis include the Blue, Green, and Orange alternatives, as well as the no-build, and that the public transportation alternatives be addressed in the supplement. The Environmental Protection Act (EPA) sets a limit for the total amount of certain

pollutants an area may generate, from all sources. This is called the “emissions budget.” The local area governments must show that their predicted emissions stay under budget. The emissions from traffic on the Parkway will be considered with the regional “emissions budget” for the Knoxville area.

The Department recognizes citizen concerns about air quality impacts to children and other sensitive populations, and is actively working to address these issues. TDOT and the Tennessee Diesel Working Group recently received a National Leadership Recognition Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for our innovative use of projects and funds to reduce diesel emissions from trucks, trains, and marine vessels. The EPA also recognized TDOT for the first non-road construction program in the nation to use federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds, for developing the Locomotive Diesel Retrofit program. TDOT is strongly committed to meeting the transportation needs of the state, while at the same time protecting public safety and environmental quality.

### **Road Network and Connectivity**

In response to the Team’s recommendation, the TDOT Long Range Planning Division has been coordinating with the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO). Their particular focus is in the vicinity of the proposed SR-475 interchange with I-40, where rapid development is occurring in far west Knox County and the eastern edge of Loudon County. Meetings have occurred to discuss ways to improve connections within the secondary road network in the area to reduce the need for vehicles to access the interstate for relatively short trips. It has been noted that the RPDRT did recommend no new interchanges within two miles of the SR-475 connection to I-40. As this project continues in the development process, coordination with the Knoxville TPO will continue to occur.

### **Transportation Budget**

TDOT is living within its budget. A number of forces have come together to severely constrain funding availability for transportation projects, not only here in Tennessee but across the country. The primary factors are: federal funding rescissions; reduced rate of growth in state and federal gasoline tax revenues; dramatically increased construction and maintenance costs; increased maintenance of aging transportation infrastructure; and, continuing growth in needs for transportation investments. These factors were a part of the discussion in Tennessee’s Long Range Transportation Plan.

Tolling was one alternative financing tool cited for further study as part of a review of alternative transportation funding sources in the Long Range Transportation Plan. Earlier this year, legislation passed authorizing TDOT to present to the General Assembly no more than two candidate pilot projects for tolling, one involving a bridge and one being a highway route. Toll revenues would be used to pay debt service on bonds issued to finance the project

during construction and for maintenance and operation of the system. The Department is not considering selling tollways to private owners. This issue is not on the table. The legislation passed by both houses of the General Assembly does not include any authority for such a sale. Nor does it allow tolls for existing roads. The legislation requires that proposed pilot toll projects be new construction and that they be constructed, maintained and operated by TDOT.

It is also important to note that the state General Assembly has not authorized TDOT to start developing a proposed statewide toll system. The State General Assembly has asked TDOT to identify two “pilot” projects as examples, and then seek the legislature’s approval to develop these projects as toll roads. TDOT is now looking at various potential projects across the state and are expected to make a recommendation to the legislature next year. The legislation just passed by both houses of the General Assembly also requires that tolled facilities be located in such a manner that alternative routes are available for those who do not want to pay a toll. With regard to public involvement, this legislation also requires public hearings on the tolling concept as well as public participation in the pilot projects that would be brought before the General Assembly for approval.

During the discussion of the tolling legislation by the Transportation Committees of both houses in the General Assembly, questions were raised regarding approaches to tolling and the evaluation of possible tolling opportunities. As a result, the Wilbur Smith and Associates study was commissioned to provide TDOT and others with information on both how a tolling feasibility study would be conducted and also about the application of such a study to three types of facilities in Tennessee. The information gained through the studies was a part of the discussion with the General Assembly as they considered and then passed legislation on tolling. The “SR-475 Conceptual Feasibility Report” is available for public review on our website

[www.tn.gov/tdot/documents/tollstudy/SR475Conceptual.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/tdot/documents/tollstudy/SR475Conceptual.pdf). Please remember, there is no existing proposal to toll SR-475. TDOT has undertaken conceptual feasibility studies of candidate projects in order to determine how much analysis should be done and to provide evidence that there are projects in Tennessee where tolling would provide an alternative funding mechanism. The department has made no decision on pilot projects to be recommended per legislature.

If the General Assembly were to authorize the Knoxville Parkway as a toll facility, TDOT would abide by strict environmental standards. Any transportation project, including tollway projects, undertaken by TDOT involving federal aid funding or constituting a major federal action are subject to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. Until recently, there were no established procedures for conducting an environmental analysis of transportation projects, including tollway projects, undertaken by TDOT not

involving federal aid funding or constituting a major federal action. On April 16, 2007, TDOT adopted the Tennessee Environmental Procedures Manual which outlines the environmental process for all transportation projects, regardless of funding source. The procedures outlined in the Manual include specific steps to involve resource and regulatory agencies, as well as the public, early and throughout the project development process. The Manual is available on the TDOT website at: [www.tn.gov/tdot/environment/tepm.htm](http://www.tn.gov/tdot/environment/tepm.htm).

One question submitted to TDOT which I felt should be included in this status report to the RPDRT is “Why wasn’t the eastern leg discussed by the Resource Team during the Context Sensitive Solution planning phase?” The tolling conceptual feasibility study looked only at the feasibility for tolling given traffic and revenue forecasts. In order to evaluate the feasibility for tolling the entire arc of SR-475 was studied, including the impact of completion of the arc to the east. The study did not in any way look at other issues associated with the eastern segment. The Resource Team was charged with enhancing the design for the western (Orange Route) segment of SR-475. In fact, the feasibility of tolling the Orange Route was not part of the charge to the Team. Without question, the design features for the Orange Route recommended by the Team are critical to the planning for this facility regardless of the method of funding.

We appreciate your input regarding the transportation system in the east Tennessee area. Project Management is the application of knowledge in three areas: people, process, and tools. These are applied to project activities to meet project requirements. The RPDRT reduced the impacts of the project to the greatest extent possible while still achieving project goals. Though the team is not actively meeting at this time, it is still our intent to keep you and the public informed through all phases of this important project. If you should have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (865)594-2334.

Sincerely,

Michael W. Russell, P E.  
Project Manager

MWR: MR; rp

Cc: Commissioner Gerald F. Nicely  
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