

## Nicely Says “Listening Sessions” Are Key To Review Process

Transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely says he is pleased the UT Center for Transportation Research will begin “Listening Sessions” this week on the 15 highway projects under evaluation by the center with the first session to be held May 12 at the Oak Ridge Civic Center regarding State Route 475 Bypass.

Noting that public input is a valuable tool, Nicely said the sessions would help the UT Transportation Center as it reviews the process the Department of Transportation used in developing these highway projects.

“Our goal is to have an independent review of the process in highway planning which is well represented in these projects. Even though we are already looking at making changes in the way we develop projects, want to know whether the development process on these particular projects was adequate,” said Nicely.

Shortly after taking office, Nicely asked the center to review 15 projects based on complaints Governor Bredesen heard when he campaigned for Governor last year. Those complaints along with others about public involvement in the TDOT decision-making process resulted in Governor Bredesen calling for reforming TDOT during his first term in office.

Dr. Steve Richards, the Executive Director of the UT Transportation Research Center will oversee the UT review team. He and his staff have assembled key data on these projects, however the “listening sessions” will be the first opportunity to go to communities, and get input from property owners, public officials and other impacted citizens.

According to Dr. Richards, the team has reviewed pertinent information on the fifteen projects including input gathered at public meetings held by the Department of Transportation as the projects were being developed. Significant efforts have also been made to solicit materials from environmental and other interest groups.

Dr. Richards says each session will focus on a specific highway project and will be held in the impacted communities, however, due to project magnitude, more than one session will be necessary for a few of the projects. Eighteen “listening sessions” have been scheduled for the projects beginning in May and continuing through June. Each session will start at 6:30 pm local time.

In addition to the project review Nicely has also taken the additional step of appointing Ed Cole, who has a background in environmental issues and planning, to head up a proposed new Bureau of Environment and Planning. This bureau will oversee the planning and environmental processes in the Department of Transportation and will strive to improve them. Legislation is currently moving through the state legislature, which would make the organizational change in the state agency official.

### TDOT 15: An Independent Review of Highway Projects in Tennessee Listening Session Dates and Sites All sessions start at 6:30pm local time.

Date	Project	City	Facility
May 12	State Route 475	Oak Ridge	Oak Ridge Civic Center
May 13	State Route 451	Cookeville	Cookeville Community Center
May 14	James White Parkway Extension	Knoxville	South Doyle Middle School
May 20	State Route 475	Lenoir City	Lenoir City High School
May 21	US 321	Greeneville	Tusculum College
May 22	Pellissippi Parkway Extension	Maryville	Maryville High School
May 27	US 127 (State Route 28) South	Crossville	Cumberland County Community Complex
May 28	State Route 840 South	Franklin	Franklin High School
May 29	State Route 840 South	Leiper's Fork	Hillsborough/Leiper's Fork Community Center
June 3	State Route 357 Extension	Blountville	Sullivan Central High School
June 4	US 321	Gatlinburg	American Legion
June 10	Wolf River Parkway	Germantown	Germantown Center (tentative site)
June 11	Jackson East bypass	Jackson	UT Agriculture Center
June 12	Walnut Grove Relocation	Memphis	Shelby Farms Agricultural Center
June 16	US 127 North	Crossville	Cumberland County Community Complex
June 17	US 64	Cleveland	Cleveland State Community College
June 19	State Route 475	Knoxville	Karns Intermediate School
June 24	State Route 840 North	Clarksville	Austin Peay State University (tentative site)
June 25	State Route 840 North	Gallatin	Gallatin Community Center