

# **Tennessee Department of Transportation 15 Project Case Study**

## **Project Assessment Final Report State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route)**

Prepared for the Commissioner  
Tennessee Department of Transportation

by

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# 1. Introduction

## Background

This report presents the findings and recommendations resulting from an independent assessment of the proposed State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project. This assessment was conducted by The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research at the special request of Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) Commissioner Gerald Nicely. This assessment was part of a Case Study of 15 proposed or pending highway projects located across the state. In requesting the Case Study, Commissioner Nicely and TDOT leaders acknowledged the changing nature of transportation project planning and management in the state, and also the Department's goal to enhance some of its planning and business practices in response to these changes.

As noted in the Proposal/Statement of Work document for the 15 Project Case Study, the planning, design and construction of major highway projects are accomplished in a long-term and comprehensive process in Tennessee and elsewhere. Typically, a major highway project undertaken by TDOT will require eight to 10 years from the initial planning phase through the final construction. At the beginning of project development, critical decisions are made that set the direction and scope for the project. In the past, when Tennessee's population was not booming, industries had not yet realized the strategic location of the state, personal technology was for the select few, and government was held in high esteem, decisions made early in project development tended to hold true throughout the process.

The decision process for highway projects must be approached in a different fashion in today's world. Citizens want a bottom-line look at what government is producing and why. They want to understand government's decision-making process and be invited to participate. The growth and diversification of Tennessee's population has also resulted in new and greater needs. The state's rural areas and cities are facing mobility and quality of life issues that require a range of transportation solutions and frequent public involvement in the decision-making process.

In today's fast-moving environment, community growth patterns are shifting, citizens' expectations are changing and residents' transportation needs are diverse. TDOT's highway projects, however, still require years to complete. The Department realizes that to keep pace with the 21<sup>st</sup> century society, TDOT needs to change and update some of its planning and business practices. The Case Study described and documented herein is intended as an initial step for TDOT in this change process. Through the review of the 15 major highway projects, including State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project, the Case Study will provide critical input for TDOT to begin to identify areas for improvement and ways to better serve Tennessee's citizens.

## **Report Overview**

This Project Assessment Final Report summarizes the work performed to evaluate the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project, as well as the results and conclusions of this work. Following the introduction section, Section 2 presents a description of the study scope and methodology used to evaluate the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project, as well as the other 14 projects included in the Case Study. Next, there is a description and discussion of the information gathering activities which were undertaken specifically for State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project (Section 3), followed by a summary of project information resulting from these data collection activities (Section 4). The project information summary includes a project description, a history of the project and project planning activities undertaken to date, and the current status of the project.

The remaining sections of the report present the findings and conclusions reached by the evaluation team. Section 5 documents the key “process-related” issues and concerns for the project that were reported to and/or identified by the evaluation team. Section 6 presents the team’s assessment conclusions, and Section 7 presents the team’s recommendations for needed actions by TDOT and/or others.

It should be noted that this is the only report and the Final Report for the subject project that was generated by the Case Study effort. In keeping with the objectives of the Case Study and the utility of this document, this report is concise and direct to the point. It should also be noted that this report does not address legal requirements or obligations of TDOT or any other entity, and should not be construed to do so. Rather, it is the intent of this report to identify remaining project issues and suggest improved practices, both to be considered by the Department.

## 2. Case Study Description

### Study Objectives

As noted previously, a primary objective of the 15 Project Case Study was to provide input for TDOT to identify areas for improvement of its highway project planning and business practices so that the Department can better serve Tennessee's citizens. This objective was effectively addressed by identifying problem areas that were common to at least some or many of the projects evaluated, and suggesting corrective actions to be considered. (These "over-arching" areas for improvement are identified and discussed in a separate report that is being prepared for submission in the latter part of August.)

With specific regard to the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project and the other selected projects, the Case Study was also intended to provide TDOT with impartial recommendations on whether selected highway projects should continue as presently scheduled or whether additional action(s) should be undertaken. This objective of the study, relative to the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project, is addressed in this report.

### Study Scope

It is important to note that the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project was one of 15 major highway projects selected for inclusion in the Case Study, and that each of the projects received the same level, detail and type of assessment. The projects selected for the Study are enumerated below, including the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project:

1. State Route 840 South
2. Wolf River Parkway in Memphis
3. State Route 451 – Cookeville area
4. US 127S – Crossville
5. US 64 – Polk and Bradley Counties
- 6. State Route 475 - Knoxville Beltway (orange route)**
7. James White Parkway Extension – Knoxville
8. Pellissippi Parkway Extension – Knoxville
9. US 321 (State Route 35) – Greenville
10. State Route 840 North
11. Walnut Grove Relocation Project in Memphis
12. Jackson Bypass
13. US 127N – Crossville
14. US 321 – between Gatlinburg and Cosby
15. State Route 357 Extension – Blountville

As defined in the Proposal/Statement of Work document, the Case Study had a focused scope, which directed the evaluation team to address the following areas of concern (expressed as questions to be answered) for each of the 15 projects:

- What were the reasons for starting the project and should the reasons be reevaluated?
- What are the economic, environmental and social affects of the project?
- What is the project's relationship to the local and/or regional comprehensive plans, and if appropriate, the plans of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)?
- What was the extent of public involvement in the project development, and was it appropriate for the decision-making process?
- Should the department consider additional actions before continuing with the project as currently scheduled?

The Case Study had a restricted budget and an aggressive time schedule of four months for completion. It was not the intent of the Case Study, or individual project assessments, to re-do the planning and decision-making for one or any of the projects. Rather, it was the goal of the Case Study and individual project assessments to evaluate the overall planning “process (es)” undertaken to date, and to determine if deficiencies or omissions existed. Based on these “process” assessments, the two objectives of the study were accomplished. That is: (1) to provide TDOT with impartial recommendations on whether selected highway projects should continue as presently scheduled or whether additional action(s) should be undertaken; and (2) to provide input for TDOT to identify areas for improvement of its highway project planning and business practices. It should also be emphasized that it was **not** the intent of the Case Studies to recommend to TDOT specific actions to take, but rather to identify areas that need some action.

### **Study Methodology Overview**

An evaluation team comprised of distinguished faculty and staff from The University of Tennessee was assembled to evaluate and render judgment on the 15 projects under review. Resumes for each of these individuals are contained in the Proposal/Statement of Work document for the Case Study, available from The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research. All of the team members have extensive experience in the transportation field, and the team members collectively bring diverse backgrounds and balance in the key areas of transportation and land use planning, highway location and design, environmental assessment, and transportation/traffic impact assessment.

The team members were:

- Dr. Stephen Richards, Team Leader
- Dr. David Middendorf
- Dr. Gregory Reed
- Dr. Tom Urbanik
- Dr. Mary English
- Dr. Arun Chatterjee
- Dr. Fred Wegmann
- Dr. John Tidwell

Figure 1 presents a summary of the activities (work tasks) that were undertaken to complete the Case Study. A detailed description of each of these activities is contained in the Proposal/Statement of Work document. It is significant to note at this point that a tremendous effort was made to gather any and all pertinent project-related information that could be useful to the evaluation team. Also, public listening sessions were held for each project, and members of the evaluation team met with and/or interviewed countless interest groups, officials, and concerned individuals to gather input and identify areas of concerns. It should be emphasized that the information gathering activities focused on the intended “process” assessment.

Section 3 of this report presents additional detail on the information and input gathered specifically for the State Route 475 – Knoxville Beltway (orange route) project. All of the information received and gathered for the project is being retained on-site at The University of Tennessee Center for Transportation Research, and is available for inspection and duplication by appointment or advance notice. In addition, as a disclaimer, Section 3 does not attempt to itemize every individual document, e-mail, phone call, etc. that was reviewed by team members; however, all records are available for inspection.

After extensive review, discussion and assessment of each of the projects under study, the evaluation team reached consensus concerning answers to the questions posed in the Proposal/Statement of Work document (see Study Scope of this report). The evaluation team ultimately chose to present its conclusions by indicating whether the project planning and decision-making processes were **adequate or inadequate** with regard to the following issue areas:

- Project need adequately established?
- Planning process appropriate for need?
- Alternative appropriate?
- Design process appropriate for need?
- Local planning involvement?
- Public involvement appropriate for decision-making?
- Adequate environmental, economic and social assessment?

The conclusions reached by the evaluation team regarding the above issue areas were used by the team as a basis for recommendations on needed actions. Sections 6 and 7 of this report present the team assessments and recommendations, respectively.

## **Figure 1. Summary of Case Study Activities**

### **Task 1 – Gather Comprehensive Background Information**

Task 1.1 – Solicit/Receive Pertinent Project Documents and Related Materials

Task 1.2 – Interview State and Local Officials

Task 1.3 – Review Pertinent Planning and Research Documents

### **Task 2 – Finalize Case Study Methodology**

Task 2.1 – Determine Project Issues

Task 2.2 – Refine Project Assessment Criteria and Procedures

### **Task 3 – Provide Information Clearinghouse**

Task 3.1 – Establish Case Study Point-of-Contact

Task 3.2 - Prepare/Distribute Daily Project Updates

Task 3.3 – Provide Media and Public Information (as appropriate)

### **Task 4 – Solicit Interest Group and Public Input**

Task 4.1 – Solicit/Receive Pertinent Project Issue-related Materials

Task 4.2 - Conduct Public Input Sessions

Task 4.3 – Attend Interest Group Briefings

### **Task 5 – Conduct In-depth Project (Issues) Reviews**

Task 5.1 – Establish Work Teams

Task 5.2 – Compile and Analyze Project Information/Input

Task 5.3 – Refine/Clarify Project Issues

Task 5.4 – Develop Draft Project Critiques

### **Task 6 – Conduct/Complete Project (Issues) Evaluations**

Task 6.1 – Establish Senior Review Team

Task 6.2 – Review/Finalize Project Critiques

Task 6.3 – Develop/Document Findings and Recommendations

### **Task 7 – Document Case Study Findings**

Task 7.1 – Prepare/Submit Project Reports

Task 7.2 – Prepare/Submit Case Study Overview Report

### **3. Information/Input Reviewed**

#### **Documents and Correspondence**

The review of the Knoxville Beltway (SR 475) project was based in part on an examination of existing documents and other materials pertaining to the project. These documents and materials included the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the long range transportation plan for the Knoxville urban area, minutes of meetings of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), reports and materials submitted by local interest groups, and various newspaper articles. These materials were obtained from or submitted by the Tennessee Department of Transportation, the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization, Citizens Against the Beltway Orange Location (CABOL), Citizens Urging a Responsible Beltway Selection (CURBS), and the Knoxville Area Chamber Partnership.

Another important source of information was correspondence received from concerned citizens and elected officials. A total of 170 individual pieces of correspondence, including letters and e-mail messages, were received. This correspondence provided valuable information and insight into the various issues surrounding the Knoxville Beltway project.

#### **Meetings**

Members of the evaluation team met with individuals representing various groups and agencies with an interest in the Knoxville Beltway project, often at the request of these groups or agencies. These meetings were held for various purposes. They provided an opportunity to exchange information, identify or clarify issues concerning the Knoxville Beltway project, and determine the existence and availability of other documents and materials that might assist the evaluation team in reviewing the project.

Meetings were held with Mr. Jeff Welch, MPO Coordinator, and Mr. Michael D. Conger, Senior Transportation Engineer, Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization; members of the Lenoir City Committee of 100 on June 9, 2003, and others:

#### **Public Listening Sessions**

Three Public Listening Sessions were conducted to give individual citizens, elected officials, property owners, and organized groups affected by or interested in the Knoxville Beltway project an opportunity to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns regarding the project as well as provide information to the evaluation team on the relevant issues. The first session was held at the Community Center in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, on Monday, May 12, 2003. Approximately 143 people attended this session, and 25 of the attendees spoke at the microphone. The second session was held at the

Lenoir City High School in Lenoir City, Tennessee, on Tuesday, May 20, 2003. Approximately 315 people attended this session, including the Mayor of Lenoir City, the Loudon County Executive, a Loudon County Commissioner, and the Chairman of the Loudon Chamber of Commerce. A total of 30 of the attendees spoke at the microphone. The third Public Listening Session on the Knoxville Beltway project was held at the Karns Intermediate School in Knoxville, Tennessee, on Thursday, June 19, 2003. Over 600 people attended this session, including the Mayor of Knoxville, a State Senator, and three Knox County Commissioners. About 70 of the attendees spoke at the microphone. In addition to the input received from persons who spoke publicly at these three sessions, 93 people who attended one of the three sessions submitted comments on the “comment cards” that were handed out at the registration desk. Many attendees also submitted prepared written statements and various other documents and written materials for the evaluation team to review.

## 4. Project Information Summary

### Project Description

This project involves the construction of a new, access-controlled, divided highway connecting Interstate 75 (I-75) southwest of Knoxville, Tennessee, with I-75 north of the city, thereby providing a bypass route around the northwest side of the Knoxville metropolitan area. The Point of Beginning (POB) of the project is a location on I-75 near Lenoir City, Tennessee, that is approximately 5.8 miles southwest of the merging of I-40 and I-75. The Point of Ending (POE) is a location on I-75 north of Knoxville that is approximately three miles north of the existing I-75 interchange at State Route 61 (SR 61) near Norris, Tennessee. The roadway is functionally classified as a principal arterial and is proposed to be included in the National Highway System (NHS). Known officially as State Route 475 (SR 475), the proposed highway is also referred to as the Knoxville Beltway since it is part of a proposed beltway that is envisioned to eventually connect to I-40 east of Knoxville.

Of the three alternative alignments for SR 475 that were evaluated during the preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), TDOT chose the one known as the Orange Alternate or Orange Route. This alignment is a combination of existing right-of-way and new right-of-way between the POB and the POE. The Orange Route follows the existing I-75 alignment from the POB near Lenoir City to the I-40/I-75 interchange, a distance of approximately 5.7 miles. Under the proposed SR 475 project, this stretch of I-75 would be widened to three traffic lanes in each direction. From the I-40/I-75 interchange to a new interchange with I-75 approximately 1.9 miles north of the existing I-75 interchange at SR 170 (Raccoon Valley Road), the Orange Route is located on new right-of-way. The length of this middle section is approximately 24.4 miles. The final section of the Orange Route coincides with I-75 for a distance of approximately 6.4 miles to the POE. Unlike the other I-75 portion of the Orange Route, there are no plans to widen this section of I-75 to six lanes. The total length of the Orange Route from POB to POE is approximately 36.5 miles.

For the portion of the Orange Route located on new right-of-way, the roadway would have the following typical cross-section:

- Two 12-ft traffic lanes in each direction,
- 12-ft outside shoulders,
- 6-ft median shoulders,
- 48-ft depressed median, and
- 300-ft minimum right-of-way width.
- The design speed is 70 mph.

Access to SR 475 would be permitted only at interchanges. Seven interchanges have been proposed for the section of the Orange Route on new right-of-way at I-75, I-

40, intersecting state routes, and other selected intersecting highways. The number of planned grade separations or overpasses at other selected intersecting roadways is 17. Six intersecting roads would be closed with frontage roads or service drives provided where required to maintain access to existing development.

## **Project History**

The notion for a major roadway around the northwest side of the Knoxville metropolitan area goes back over 30 years. In 1971 the East Tennessee Development District (ETDD) proposed a western regional bypass in its Major Road Plan. The Plan recommended that the Raccoon Valley-Edgemore Road corridor from I-75 to SR 95 be a component of a regional transportation system. The ETDD has continued to include a regional beltway in its Major Road Plan. The General Plan and Major Road Plan adopted by the Knoxville-Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC) in the early 1970s also proposed a regional beltway along with a system of regional freeways, arterials, and parkways.

In a memorandum to the Tennessee Tollway Authority (TTA) in 1976, TDOT suggested the idea of financing the construction of the Knoxville Bypass Route as a tollway. The TTA hired Hensley-Schmidt, Inc., to conduct a feasibility study. A traffic survey and a route reconnaissance survey were completed to locate a possible new route. The study concluded that a tollway might be feasible even though data were limited.

In 1994, the ETDD and the Knoxville-Knox County MPC requested TDOT to begin a study of the proposed beltway. On November 11, 1994, the Executive Board of the Knoxville Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) passed a resolution requesting TDOT to conduct a feasibility study identifying potential corridors between I-75 North and I-40/I-75 for the western leg of a regional bypass and that the study be conducted in Fiscal Year 1996. On February 28, 1996, the Knoxville Urban Area MPO Executive Board passed a resolution requesting that the eastern leg of the beltway – from I-75 North to I-40 East – also be included in the feasibility study. TDOT and the MPO conducted fieldwork for the western portion during the summer of 1996 and for the eastern portion in December 1996.

The 1995 Long Range Transportation Plan adopted by the Knoxville Urban Area MPO on May 24, 1995, identified the need for a Regional Beltway from Watt Road in West Knox County to I-75 in North Knox County. However, the Plan recommended that an alternate source of funding be identified, since the project could not be accomplished with projected available funds.

The 1998-2000 State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) proposed funding for preliminary engineering for a segment of the western leg of the beltway.

TDOT conducted five informal public meetings in early 1997 to gather public input on potential routes for the western beltway. The meetings were held on January 27

in Lenoir City, January 28 in Oak Ridge, January 30 in Kingston, February 3 in the Karns Community of Knoxville, and February 4 in Clinton. The meetings followed an open house format in which interested citizens could arrive at any time during a four-hour period to review and comment on the Blue and Orange Route as developed at that time. As a result of these initial public meetings, the path of the Blue Route was revised to avoid any encroachment of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Reservation near Oak Ridge. In addition, a third alternate alignment, known as the Green Route, was developed.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was prepared and approved on December 18, 2001. The DEIS considered and compared the social, economic, and environmental consequences of the Blue, Orange, and Green Routes.

Following the completion of the DEIS, five public hearings were held in early 2002. The hearings took place on February 19 in Oak Ridge, February 20 in Lenoir City, February 25 in Clinton, February 26 in the Karns Community of Knoxville, and March 5 in Kingston. Like the earlier public meetings, the hearings followed an open house format. TDOT representatives were present to answer questions and provide information, but no formal presentation was made.

On July 31, 2002, TDOT announced that it had selected the Orange Route through West and North Knox County as the preferred alignment for SR 475.

### **Project Status**

At the time TDOT put the SR 475 project on hold for review, preliminary engineering was underway and the final Environmental Impact Statement was being prepared.

## **5. Process-Related Issues and Concerns**

### **Project Justification**

The available documentation and interviews conducted indicated that this project has the following issues concerning justification.

- The I-40 / 75 corridor between the two I-40 / 75 interchanges is congested and will continue to worsen. Relieving this segment of traffic with origin and destinations west of Knoxville to North of Knoxville will reduce congestion in this area.
- Currently Knoxville does not have an adequate alternative to the I-40 / 75 link in the event of a long-term highway incident. The project under consideration would serve as this alternate link, even for east west I-40 traffic.

### **Relationship to Local/Regional Planning Efforts**

Documentation reviewed indicates that this project is part of the Knoxville Urban Transportation Plan. It is part of the Knoxville MPO FY 2002-2004 Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). The above notwithstanding, there seems to be a strained relationship between TDOT and the Knoxville MPO, which may reduce the effectiveness of the planning process. The MPO should be recognized as the lead in developing the Urban Transportation Plan, with TDOT a cooperating partner. Much of the perceived conflict may be reduced if all parties took the cooperative nature of the Urban Transportation Planning Process seriously.

The MPO should not strive to use its authority to drive local political issues. TDOT should not seek to use the MPO as a rubber stamp on their unilateral decisions. Each must be recognized as essential cooperating partners, desiring to achieve optimal service for the public.

### **Environmental, Social, and Economic Impacts**

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) has been prepared and circulated, and comments received. TDOT is currently preparing the Final EIS. A review of the DEIS indicates that the impacts of the alternatives being considered have been adequately considered and documented to date. However, as the preferred alternative is selected, the efforts should be made to mitigate specific potential negative impacts. These should be addressed in the Final EIS and specific commitments made to incorporate appropriate design details and construction procedures that will address community concerns.

## **Public Input**

Several public hearings and meetings have been held on this project. TDOT utilized their normal public involvement process (for the time), which in general meets minimal FHWA guidelines in order to qualify for federal funding. As the team received input from individuals at the Listening Sessions, it was noted that there were significant issues, which in the minds of a substantial number of citizens, had not been adequately addressed.

Many of those that spoke at the Listening Sessions had the perception that TDOT's public involvement effort was limited to informing the public about decisions that had already been made. They did not believe that TDOT seriously wanted to use the process to assist them in decision-making. No doubt, some of this negative attitude comes from those who believed that they would be adversely affected by the project. However, there did seem to be some real unresolved issues that were disturbing the public.

## **Other (Issues and Concerns)**

This project has become controversial because of the perception that some of the public has concerning TDOT's lack of interest in the environmental, social and economic impacts of their actions. In any worthwhile large public works project, someone's property may be taken, and someone will have to live near the facility. Someone will benefit from the project while others may perceive that they will be a loser if the project is built. The controversy on this particular project is centered on those who believe that they will be losers in the process. A more cooperative process would mitigate these issues.

This project provides TDOT with the opportunity to show that it can be sensitive to environmental, social and economic issues both real and perceived. As it moves into the design and construction phases, TDOT should be very alert to this need. In other similar highly emotionally charged projects, opposition groups have filed lawsuits and carried out other forms of protest. A cooperative attitude in lieu of an adversarial stance will go a long way to reducing the likelihood of conflict.

## 6. Assessment Results and Findings

Table 1 presents a summary of the project assessment results and conclusions as determined by the evaluation team. As noted in the Study Methodology Overview (see Section 2 of this report), the team chose to present its conclusions by indicating whether the project planning and decision-making processes were **satisfactory (S)** or **unsatisfactory (U)** with regard to 7 issue areas. These issue areas are identified again below and described in more detail:

1. Project need adequately established? – The team considered what the reasons were for starting the project and assessed whether or not these reasons were adequately supported and are still valid.
2. Planning process appropriate for need? – The team assessed the overall planning process for the project to determine if it was appropriate in scale and scope, and also complete, given the nature of the project and project need.
3. Alternatives appropriate? – The team considered whether adequate identification and assessments of alternatives and options were performed during the planning and decision-making processes.
4. Design process appropriate for need? – The team assessed the overall design process for the project to determine if it was appropriate in scale and scope and complete given the nature of the project and project need.
5. Local planning involvement? – The team determined and assessed the project’s relationship and compatibility to the local and/or regional comprehensive planning efforts, MPO activities and other local transportation planning.
6. Public involvement appropriate for decision-making? – The team considered the extent of public involvement in project planning and development, and assessed whether this involvement was appropriate and timely relative to decision-making.
7. Adequate environmental, economic and social assessment? – The team assessed whether required or warranted assessments of environmental, economic and social impacts of the project were performed, and whether these assessments were adequate for the particular project circumstances.

A satisfactory (S) assessment in an issue area indicates that the evaluation team reached a consensus conclusion that the actions taken to date by TDOT have been at least adequate and no corrective actions are suggested. On the other hand, an unsatisfactory (U) assessment in an area indicates that the evaluation team reached a consensus conclusion that the actions taken to date by TDOT have not been totally adequate and some corrective actions are suggested. For some issue areas, the evaluation team

concluded that, given the current status of the project, the issue area is simply not applicable for a meaningful assessment and/or any actions that have been taken to date are incomplete but not yet deficient as to warrant an unsatisfactory assessment. In these cases, an N.A./I assessment is reported in Table 1. (Note: the N.A./I assessment was not used on all projects.)

**Table 1. Summary of Project Assessment Results**

Issue Area	Assessment	Comments
Need adequately established?	S	The Knoxville transportation system is constrained by a single highway (I-40/75) serving regional east-west and north-south traffic. The project is part of the MPO plan. The project is the result of a locally defined need.
Planning process appropriate for need?	S	The unfortunate outcome of the planning process was a divided community pitting those who would benefit from the project versus those who perceived adverse impacts. No serious attempt was demonstrated to mitigate concerns. The planning process should embrace a cooperative urban and regional planning involvement that more clearly identifies the benefits and more clearly addresses the concerns.
Alternatives appropriate?	N.A./I	The orange alternative corridor better meets the general project needs. However, the preferred orange alternative had only minor evaluation of possible refinements of the alignments, which could potentially mitigate some of the negative project impacts.
Design process appropriate for need?	N.A./I	Project design is just beginning. Project design has in the past been considered an engineering detail that is done without community input. The design process should consider a “context sensitive design” approach that considers the community and the environment in the selection of design details.
Local planning involvement?	S	The MPO Has supported the project. TDOT has not addressed several of the TPO requested analyses and other impacted local planning groups should have been more involved in the planning process.
Public involvement appropriate for decision-making?	U	The TDOT public involvement process was extensive, but did little to mitigate the legitimate concerns of those affected by the project. TDOT allowed special interest groups and individuals to divide the community.
Adequate environmental, economic, and social assessment	N.A./I	The final EIS has not been prepared. While the environmental process may satisfy the regulations, mitigation of community concerns should be better reflected in the final environmental impact statement.

## **7. Recommendations**

If TDOT decides to continue moving ahead with the Orange Route, the Department should consider a more interactive process with the community. All prior assumptions, which have been made, that have brought the Orange Route project to this stage, should be evaluated in more detail with appropriate regional and local planning groups, and the community. This process may result in a refinement of the alignment including location and number of interchanges, which best meets community needs while being sensitive to project impacts.

It is also the opinion of the evaluation committee that, should TDOT elect to revisit alternatives (other than the Orange Route) or develop new alternatives, that the Department should consider the same interactive process with the community described above.

As TDOT designs the refined alternative, they should consider processes that obtain meaningful public input from individuals, citizen groups, and local governments. Simply holding another hearing to inform the public which design details have been selected will not achieve this goal. TDOT should obtain input from the community at large and demonstrate to those involved that their views have been considered and implemented where feasible.

Innovative design and construction procedures could be incorporated into the next stages of the project to mitigate as much as possible any adverse effects of the project. The context sensitive design concept assesses community and environmental issues, as well as traditional engineering issues utilized.