

TDOT PUBLIC MEETING

KINGSPORT I-26 STUDY PUBLIC MEETING

January 07, 2020



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TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

KINGSPORT I-26 STUDY PUBLIC MEETING

City of Kingsport
V.O. Dodd Sr. Complex
Eastman Foundation Conference Room
301 Louis Street
Kingsport, TN 37664
January 7, 2020

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. EBBERT: All right, ladies and gentlemen, if you-all want to take your seats, we're getting ready to get started.

Welcome, everybody. My name's Troy Ebbert, with TDOT Long-range Planning. I appreciate you-all being here tonight. I'll make a real quick introduction on who's here and what we're going to do tonight, and then I will let the consultants, Amy and Troy, go through.

There are a lot people here from TDOT. There's a lot of elected officials here. We really appreciate y'all being here.

There's a sign-in sheet up front. Make sure everyone's signed in when you came in. There are survey cards up there and information. I have comment sheets that I'll bring in -- they're in the car -- that you can take with you if you -- and I'll put them out here at the table. So check those out on your way out.

If you have specific comments that you would like to make about what we're looking at for I-26 on this study, this is basically the results of

1 our last study, from what we've been doing for the
2 last year or so. And Matt and his team will talk
3 more specific about what those are.

4 But as far as comments, we need your
5 information. That's why we're here tonight. Okay?
6 We want to see if you like what we're talking about,
7 if these are issues, if we've missed anything,
8 and -- or if there's thing on here that have already
9 been taken care of.

10 I have comment sheets up here you can
11 take with you, you can fill out. You can take them
12 to your friends, they can fill them out, the
13 surveys.

14 Jennifer is in the back -- Jennifer,
15 would you wave for me?

16 If you don't want to fill anything out
17 and you just want to sit and talk to somebody,
18 Jennifer, in the back, will write down everything
19 that you have to say about it and it will come to us
20 automatically. You don't even have to pick up a
21 pencil. So a really easy way, nice way to do that.

22 So if you have any questions, please let
23 me know. During -- so we'll have our presentation,
24 and then we'll have some questions afterward at some
25 of the different boards. Okay?

1 That is Matt Meservy. He is a project
2 manager working on this project.

3 And I will kick it off to you.

4 MR. MESERVY: Okay. Thank you, Troy.

5 MR. EBBERT: Make sure to fill out those
6 comment forms.

7 MR. MESERVY: I appreciate that.

8 Okay. So we don't have a lot of time.
9 And I want to make sure that we give you enough time
10 to go through and mill around and look at some of
11 these exhibits and make your comments in all the
12 different ways. We can show you how many ways there
13 are to make comments.

14 But again, my name is Matt Meservy.
15 This is Amy Canfield. We're with AECOM. We're the
16 lead consultants. We have a couple of our
17 sub-consultants out in the crowd there. They'll
18 be -- they'll also be helping answer any questions
19 as you mill around these exhibit boards.

20 So we'll dive into the purpose of this
21 study. Again, so the corridor plan takes into
22 account some of the existing deficiencies that you
23 see today, and also some of the projected
24 deficiencies that you will see in the future,
25 whether it's based on modeling, forecasting, or the

1 possibility of a new development coming in.

2 We take all of that and we develop
3 solutions to those deficiencies. And for this, this
4 project in general, we're going to be in the 20-year
5 timeframe. So anything within 20 years, we're
6 looking at developing solutions for.

7 Corridors that we're looking at right
8 now. This is a statewide corridor study, believe it
9 or not. We have four different interstates that
10 we're looking at:

11 All the way from Memphis and I-55, up to
12 Northwest Tennessee and Dyersburg on I-55.

13 The entire stretch of 75, from Georgia
14 up to Kentucky.

15 And again, 26, which is kind of why
16 we're here right now.

17 The study area for this is all of 26, so
18 it goes from the North Carolina state line all the
19 way up to just south of Virginia for the I-26
20 corridor. It includes all the four counties that
21 you would expect: Carter, Sullivan, Unicoi, and
22 Washington.

23 As Troy mentioned, this has been an
24 18-month study. We're kind of coming in on the
25 downslide now. We have a couple of weeks -- or a

1 couple of months to go before we develop our final
2 report, which is scheduled for March of 2020.

3 But as you can see, we're in the stage
4 three of this. So the first two stages had to do
5 with looking at existing deficiencies and future
6 deficiencies like they talked about.

7 The second step was to look at
8 developing goals and objectives and having some
9 performance measures that helped measure some of
10 the -- you know, the traffic and other issues that
11 you see.

12 The third step that we're in right now
13 is developing those projects. So taking all those
14 deficiencies, looking at ways that we can make those
15 solutions happen.

16 And that's kind of where we're here
17 today, is to show you some of the things that we've
18 proposed, but also to get your input on what you
19 think either we're missing or something that you, as
20 the local residents, see that we don't see in data
21 and through public -- other public meetings.

22 And then finally, the fourth step is to
23 take those projects, vet out some of the ones that
24 are not cost effective and don't match with the
25 goals and objectives, and prioritize those based on

1 a criteria that has yet to be set, but determining
2 what is the best project, bang for your buck.

3 And that's similar to this
4 prioritization. So we take -- if you think about
5 it, we take a big basket full of projects, throw
6 them in the hopper. And as it's processing, you
7 know, some of the bad projects get dropped out, but
8 eventually we'll get to the ones that have an
9 effectiveness, that meet the cost benefit ratio
10 threshold, and also actually solves that issue that
11 you're looking at.

12 So some of the goals and objectives that
13 we have established through this process and some of
14 the performance measures, you can see -- I'm not
15 going to go through this whole chart here -- but
16 over on the left side, you'll see of the goals about
17 providing efficient and reliable travel, improving
18 safety, economic development, investment equitably
19 throughout the corridor, and then making sure that
20 we have not impacted the environment substantially.

21 We take all that into account as far as
22 goals go and the objectives.

23 Performance measures. I think it would
24 make sense -- common sense to all of you that we
25 look at traffic operations like congestion, delay,

1 incidents, safety, hot spots, roadway and bridge
2 maintenance. Make sure that all those conditions
3 are in good shape. And we also look at some of the
4 multi-modal issues too, such as bicycle, pedestrian,
5 and transit.

6 So with that, I'm going to hand it over
7 to Amy, and she's going to go through the
8 deficiencies. And then we'll come back and talk
9 about some of the projects that we've identified at
10 this first initial phase of this.

11 MS. CANFIELD: Thanks, Matt.

12 MR. MESERVY: Take it away.

13 MS. CANFIELD: Okay. So as we started
14 here, we put together some different exhibits that
15 discussed deficiencies, whether they're related to
16 traffic operations, bridges, pavement, safety, and
17 even on the freight side of things.

18 Everything you're going to see on the
19 screen up here is detailed in a lot bigger text on
20 the boards around the room. So I encourage you
21 after the meeting to come and take a look at these
22 boards and talk to us about, you know, your thoughts
23 and what you see.

24 So to begin with here, one of the first
25 things that we've noticed -- and we've got some

1 little symbols too that represent whether or not the
2 deficiency itself was a data driven thing that we
3 found based on traffic operations data or crash data
4 or whether the little people symbol up there means
5 that we heard about this from someone like you, at a
6 previous public meeting or perhaps through an online
7 survey that we have up on the study website right
8 now.

9 So this first one here, congestion at
10 the I-81 interchange ramp, that was something that
11 we've heard a lot, both found in our data and heard
12 from the public.

13 Another one that we noticed while doing
14 a field review ourselves was some visibilty issues
15 due to a sun glare problem on I-26 near Eastern Star
16 Road. So at certain times of the day, this can an
17 issue.

18 Obviously, if you drive on this
19 corridor, I'm sure you've seen that, and you're
20 coming around and know that you pull on the visor or
21 get out your sunglasses so you can see what's going
22 on.

23 Congestion at State Road 381 and Highway
24 11 interchanges. So this is another spot where we
25 see a lot of traffic congestion that we found -- you

1 know, heard both from the public to and saw some in
2 our models.

3 And then finally, we identified a
4 traffic bottleneck location near Highway 400 and 91
5 interchanges. So bottleneck is if you think of, you
6 know, driving along, nice and free flow of speed,
7 and then you approach an area where the traffic all
8 slows down and you get congested for a little bit of
9 time. That's what we call a bottleneck a lot of
10 times in traffic speak.

11 All right. On the safety side of
12 things, one area where we notice a lot of crash
13 problems was right at the beginning of Highway 26,
14 you know, kind of as it comes down from Kingsport.
15 So a lot of high crash rates up here. You know,
16 potentially could be related to some roadway
17 geometry and some animal crossing issues.

18 Another area where we noticed high crash
19 rates was around the Highway 81 and US-321
20 interchanges. Again, these could be possibly
21 congestion related. This is stuff we're looking
22 into right now as we develop solutions on how to,
23 you know, potentially rectify some of these crashes
24 and reduce the crash rates.

25 We also noticed a significant number of

1 bicycle and pedestrian crashes on the surface roads
2 near the Highway 91 interchange. So although there
3 are not, you know, bicycle and pedestrians allowed
4 on Highway 26, we did take a snapshot look at where
5 there was interchange crossings and see if we had
6 any issues at those crossroads. And this is one
7 that kind of stuck out above the others as having
8 some potential problems.

9 And finally, we noticed a high crash
10 rate due to, you know, weather, steep grades, narrow
11 shoulders as you're riding, you know, through the
12 more mountainous terrain there at this other end of
13 the corridor.

14 All right. On the transit bike and
15 pedestrian side of things, just generally speaking,
16 throughout the corridor we have a lack of bicycle
17 and pedestrian facilities, both in Kingsport and in
18 Johnson City. There really isn't a lot when you
19 look at those interchange areas.

20 And when we did our analysis, we were
21 specifically looking at state route and US highway
22 road crossings of I-26 to see if they had sidewalks
23 in urban areas, did they have any kind of dedicated
24 bicycle facility, especially if it was designated as
25 a state bicycle route or some other major crossing.

1 And then we also noticed on the transit
2 side of things that although there are transit
3 systems that serve the various areas, there's no
4 regional transit connection that serves people who
5 may want to travel between Kingsport and Johnson
6 City. So we identified that as a potential
7 deficiency too, that that was a missing link in the
8 transit system.

9 All right. And then finally on the
10 freight and economic development side of things. We
11 identified a freight bottleneck between Highway 11
12 and Meadowview Parkway, and another one between
13 Highway 93 and Rock Spring Road. So this is an area
14 where we see a lot of truck traffic congestion in
15 particular.

16 And on the economic development side of
17 things, there is supposed to be a lot of employment
18 growth projection at Highway 81 and Highway 75
19 interchanges.

20 Also, around the areas of Johnson City,
21 not specifically in one spot, kind of just all
22 around the I-26 corridor, we're expecting to see a
23 significant amount of employment growth down there.

24 And we also identified -- we were
25 talking to some of our truckers during our freight

1 outreach -- that there is not enough truck parking
2 in the area; and specifically for overnight truck
3 parking, is the issue.

4 So now there's rules where truckers can
5 only drive a certain number of hours and they have
6 to get off the roads. And a lot of places, such as
7 our rest centers and other areas, do not allow
8 overnight truck parking. So we run into some
9 problems where these truckers, you know, have to get
10 off the road and there's no obvious place for them
11 to go.

12 And they don't always want to be way out
13 in the rural area if they want to be close to the
14 city where their delivery needs to be, so that they
15 can park and then, you know, get to work right away
16 the next morning too.

17 And finally, identified another freight
18 bottleneck down at the southern end of the corridor
19 near Flag Pond Road and the North Carolina state
20 line.

21 Again, these are all detailed on the
22 boards around the room, so take a look and talk to
23 us.

24 MR. MESERVY: Okay. So like Amy said,
25 you're going to see a lot more detail on these

1 boards, but we did want to go through a little bit
2 of the solutions and generalize them and put them in
3 specific categories.

4 So this first one talks about safety
5 issues. You can see we've got six items listed
6 here. We talked about the animal fencing, maybe up
7 near the northern part of the project limits.

8 Advanced signage and lighting.
9 Obviously, lighting makes -- I think that everybody
10 understands that lighting gives you more of a -- the
11 ability to see where you're going a little bit
12 better.

13 The advanced signage is something that
14 we've identified when we were traveling these
15 corridors, is that there isn't a lot of one mile
16 ahead, two mile ahead signs, so you feel like you
17 have to, you know, make that immediate turn if
18 you're not familiar with the area. So we -- that's
19 one of our recommendations.

20 Overhead signage and ITS. Again, that
21 will help with a lot of the incidents. That could
22 help. You know, help trucks could also be something
23 like that.

24 Auxiliary lanes. For those of you that
25 are not familiar with those, they are the entrance

1 and exit ramps. So they're the merging, the
2 acceleration, and the deceleration as you're
3 entering and exiting the roads.

4 If you have, you know, short segments of
5 that, you really have to -- you either gun it or
6 you're entering that traffic flow at a slower speed
7 than most of that, so that that hazardous situation.

8 Weather information systems. Again,
9 things like the glare of the sun or other -- like
10 fog or anything like that, would be something that
11 we've identified from some of the reports that we've
12 seen as far as crash stuff.

13 And then, as most of you know, I-26 has
14 not been an interstate for very long, a designated
15 interstate for very long. So the standards are not
16 necessarily up to the current interstate standards.
17 So one of the recommendations is to widen that
18 inside shoulder to give you a little more safety for
19 that.

20 Some of the operational side of things.
21 So ramp cues, that was discussed a little bit about
22 having short ramps as you exit, and how that would
23 cue up onto the interstate facility.

24 So now you've got stopped traffic
25 waiting to get off, competing with traffic that's

1 traveling at 55 miles per hour or faster. So you
2 can -- I think you can do the math and see who's
3 going to win in that. Maybe nobody.

4 We've also identified a lot of weaving
5 sections. So everybody familiar with a weaving
6 section? When somebody's trying to enter the
7 interstate while the other person's trying to get
8 off, they have to share that particular segment of
9 roadway, creating -- and I'm sure you've all
10 experienced that, where either you have to gun it --
11 it's really a hit or miss, right? No pun intended
12 when it comes to wrecks like that. But you don't
13 know what to do.

14 So some of the suggestions that we've
15 had that we've talked about would be maybe
16 increasing the spacing between the ramps so you have
17 longer weaving sections, that you don't feel like
18 you're right on top of everybody.

19 A collector distributor system, which
20 would be essentially adding a parallel route so all
21 of the weaving would happen off of the interstate.
22 But that requires a lot more, you know, right-of-way
23 and things like that. So -- but it's another tool
24 in the toolbox, I guess you could say.

25 And then finally these braided ramps,

1 which is something that's fairly new, but it's
2 essentially taking the weaving section and
3 separating the grades. So now you've got one --
4 you've got people entering and you've got people
5 exiting, kind of above and below each other. So
6 that braided ramp would eliminate the weave all
7 together and you're not sharing that same segment of
8 roadway.

9 Again, these are potential. So all this
10 is going to have to get into that hopper and vet out
11 all of these things. But again, this is where we're
12 at right now, and this is where we like to get your
13 input on some of this.

14 Transit and bike and ped. So to help
15 accommodate the proposed state bike route, we'd like
16 to add that bicycle lane on 400 at the interchange.

17 As Amy mentioned too, we'd like to
18 consider some type of commuter transit between
19 Kingsport and Johnson City to help reduce the
20 traffic. I know it's not -- you know, congestion is
21 relative right now, but we -- it's a lot cheaper to
22 do things this way as opposed to doing a major
23 construction project to add lanes on that.

24 And then along those same lines, let's
25 talk to some of the larger employers out there and

1 see if we can start to work on some kind of ride
2 sharing program. Because if you can get people in
3 van pools and car pools that are going to the same
4 destination, they can meet at a park-and-ride lot or
5 some other, you know, larger parking lot. That's
6 that many cars off of the road. So there's -- the
7 need isn't as dramatic as if everybody is traveling
8 all at the same time.

9 And then finally, just overall improving
10 the bicycle and pedestrian accommodations along the
11 interchanges. There's a lot of separation when you
12 get underneath or, you know, above wherever the
13 interchanges are, that the sidewalks stop or the
14 bike lanes stop. So those are some of those things.

15 And then as far as freight, again,
16 adding some overnight truck parking near Kingsport
17 and Johnson City.

18 Installing some cameras too. Because
19 sometimes -- if you're familiar with the TDOT
20 SmartWay System, you can go on their website and
21 click on any camera and you can see realtime traffic
22 information being videod back to you.

23 Right now, there aren't any cameras on
24 26. There's one camera at the 26 and 81
25 interchange, and that's it. But that will help not

1 just the truckers, but it can help all of the
2 general public too as they're driving through so
3 they can help plan their trip or see if they need to
4 think of an alternative route.

5 Okay. So what are the opportunities
6 that you can get involved? Well, we talked about
7 having a conversation with Ms. Jennifer back there,
8 the court reporter.

9 We have an online survey that is still
10 up and running. You can get that from our -- as you
11 exit.

12 We have some smaller cards that you can
13 take home with you that has the website address on
14 it.

15 You can speak to any member of the study
16 team and we'll jot that down.

17 Or you can fill out a comment sheet.
18 And I think we had one -- actually, they're out on
19 the table as you leave. You can either fill it out
20 and send it -- and give it to us here, or you can
21 take it home and mail it, but that would require
22 postage.

23 So it's really up to you, whatever you
24 want to do with that. But those are the four
25 alternatives to do that.

1 So with that, I think we've given you a
2 pretty good amount of time to walk around and start
3 looking more into depth in this, and then having
4 maybe some deeper conversations with us.

5 So with that, you are free to roam.
6 Thank you again.

7 PUBLIC COMMENTS

8 * * *
9

10 MR. STRONG: Tony Strong.

11 I know that it isn't applying to what
12 they're talking about, but where 26 stops at 11-W,
13 then you've still got a few miles of 23 to get into
14 Scott County, Virginia. You know, it's a Tennessee
15 road, just like the other is.

16 The truck traffic has increased
17 exponentially. And when they're coming off of the
18 ramp, they insist on using the retarders and it
19 shakes the ground. And it's just so much traffic
20 and so much noise.

21 On the right-hand side, there is no
22 sound barrier. On the left-hand side, like, the
23 entrance ramp to get back up to 26, it's probably
24 got a quarter of a mile of sound barrier. So it
25 reflects all of the traffic noise back up into our

1 neighborhood. And it's 24/7. I mean, it doesn't --
2 basically, it doesn't stop. It's a continuous
3 thing.

4 Scott County has got a lot of -- which
5 they always do -- a lot of logging going on, so the
6 chip trucks are running into the -- what is it now?
7 Is it Domtar now? It used to be the mill. I think
8 it's Domtar, the paper mill. So there's a lot of
9 woodchips going in there.

10 And then there's a tremendous amount of
11 coal trucks. And I don't know if they're hauling it
12 to Eastman or where, but they're coming out of Scott
13 County, headed up on the 26. Just a lot of noise.
14 I don't know.

15 They can spend millions and millions and
16 millions of dollars to build a welcome center at the
17 bottom of Bays Mountain, but you go by there at any
18 time of the day or night, there's nobody there. You
19 would think that they could put a sound barrier up.
20 Maybe. We'll have to talk to big boy Roy.

21 * * *

22 MR. MILNER: Chase Milner, RPO
23 Coordinator.

24 And I'm submitting comments on behalf of
25 Mayor Garland Evely. He's from Unicoi County,

1 Mayor, and as well as the Unicoi Highway
2 Superintendent.

3 Mayor Evelyn contacted me, told me he
4 couldn't make this meeting, but he wanted to share
5 both the Highway Superintendent's concerns, as well
6 as the Mayor's concerns, for the lack of safety
7 access in between the north and southbound lanes of
8 the I-26 corridor in Unicoi County.

9 So specifically from, like, the Sam's
10 Gap state border to Erwin, so to speak. There's a
11 lack of breaks in the interstate for emergency
12 vehicle and personnel to be able to do kind of a
13 cut-through from -- I guess it's the -- I say north
14 and southbound lanes, but they might be east and
15 west -- but just that there's been a request for
16 improved safety improvements by allowing emergency
17 access vehicles to break through the highway on that
18 high elevation area due to high crash activity and
19 the timing of emergency response there.

20 So just wanted to share that with you
21 and submit that to the record.

22 (END OF PUBLIC COMMENTS.)
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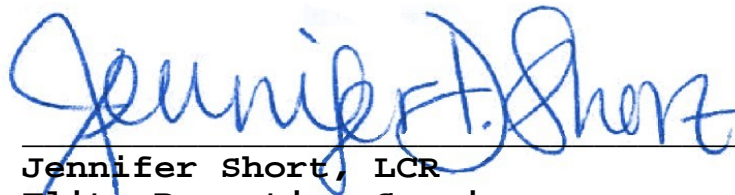
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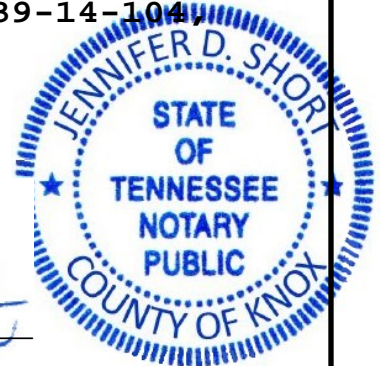
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