

Process for TDOT to Sign Named Highways and Bridges in Tennessee

As Designated by The Tennessee General Assembly

(9-15-23)

The Tennessee Department of Transportation uses a numerical designation system to identify roads on the state highway system across the state. The department does not designate road “names” for any state highways.

Local governments (city and county) have authority to designate official road names tied to official postal addresses and 911 systems for streets and roads within their jurisdiction. Cities have authority to give official city street names to state highways within their city limits because, apart from interstate highways and other freeways, these state highways are also city streets. Cities may also sometimes give commemorative or memorial names to these non-freeway state highways within their jurisdiction which are also city streets.

The Tennessee General Assembly has the authority to name highways and bridges in Tennessee, and TDOT will install signs as directed by legislation passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor. These names are honorary and typically commemorative in nature and generally do not change the official road name, and they do not change TDOT’s official numerical designation of a state highway. In recent years it has been the General Assembly’s practice to pass one large omnibus naming bill each year, which usually names approximately 50-60 bridges and highways. In some cases the State Senator or State Representative who sponsor the naming prefer a local government first pass a resolution requesting the Tennessee General Assembly name the subject bridge or highway.

The fees to fabricate and install the required signs are usually required to be non-state sourced and are sometimes paid for by local governments, the bill sponsors, or family members of the honoree. Some honorees such as a soldiers or police officers killed in the line of duty will have the fees for the signs covered by the State under Section 54-1-133 of Tennessee Code. The specific language in the enacting legislation / appropriations act directs how each sign is to be funded.

Once a bill passes to name a highway or bridge, staff of the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT HQ Traffic Engineering) sends a notice to the prime Senate and House sponsor for each honoree which directs funds are required, the amount and where to send those funds. If no fees are required, the notice advises the sponsors that TDOT can proceed.

Once any required funds are received, and if the Senate and House sponsor decide they will conduct a ceremony and notify TDOT as to when they plan to conduct their ceremony, then TDOT installs the signs several days in advance of the event and will also provide two (2) small presentation size signs. The smaller signs can be used at the ceremony so that the event can be held near the named feature (bridge or highway) and not directly along the right of way. TDOT strongly recommends that ceremonies not be held directly on the right of way in order that attendees are not placed at risk. Please note that TDOT will no longer cover signs prior to a dedication to reduce risk to private citizens who in the past have been asked to uncover signs as well as reduce the cost of having TDOT return to uncover signs.

It is important that TDOT receive a minimum of 10 workdays advance notice of the planned ceremony date as it generally takes this long to fabricate signs, check underground utilities, and install the signs. If the Senate and House sponsor decide not to conduct a ceremony, then TDOT installs the signs as soon as possible after being notified.

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