Tennessee Plan for Toll Lanes, $3.3B in Road Work

Tennessee’s Department of Transportation recently met with Governor Bill Lee’s budget team, but its larger long-term plan is on schedule to be released in December, *The Center Square* reports.

The December plan announcement for the state’s Transportation Modernization Act implementation will include a proposal to spend $3.3 billion in state funds for road work given to the department last year along with the proposal to implement toll lanes into highway plan.

The toll lane plan will allow the department to negotiate deals for private companies to add lanes to Tennessee highways and make those toll lanes, with the private company collecting tolls to recoup their portion of negotiated project costs.

Commissioner Butch Eley said the budget meeting was a huge change from a year before, when his department talked about how it was at a critical funding juncture. “We were facing unprecedented congestion, we were facing a revenue stream or funding stream that is unsustainable and, frankly, it was taking us way too long to get projects completed,” Eley said. Read more.

Tennessee’s Infrastructure Funds to Go Toward Lithium Plant

Tennessee is expected to get about $8 billion from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to go toward needed infrastructure enhancements, *CNHI News reports*. Nearly half a billion of that is planned to position the state for grid production and position Tennessee as a leader in the battery supply chain.

More than $141 million from the 2021 act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, will go toward the planned Tennessee Lithium facility in southeast Tennessee’s McMinn County. The facility is anticipated to produce 30,000 metric tons per year of lithium hydroxide for the domestic battery and
electric vehicle market.

The project is expected to double the lithium hydroxide production capacity currently available in the United States. “Piedmont Lithium plans to invest approximately $600 million in the development of Tennessee Lithium, drive significant economic activity and create approximately 120 new, direct jobs,” according to the project summary. “Piedmont plans to partner with local organizations and community stakeholders to support necessary training programs for local employees and contribute to philanthropic and civic efforts in the region.” Read more.

**Nashville is Getting a New Rooftop Solar Program**

According to WPLN, rooftop solar will soon be more affordable for some people in Nashville.

The Nashville Electric Service is creating a new program to pay households with solar panels that produce excess electricity. The program was designed through a new contract with the Tennessee Valley Authority. Between 1,000 and 1,200 homes will be able to participate in the program, based on the cap of 10 megawatts in the contract. Households that already have solar systems will be automatically switched into the program. NES estimated that about 700 homes have solar in their service territory, leaving room for 300 to 500 more households. “The teams at NES and TVA will work the remainder of 2023 on details and plan to open the program mid-winter timeframe,” NES said in a statement.

Nationally, solar panels cover the rooftops of 3% of all households. In Nashville, or in the NES service territory, just 0.16% of households have solar. The new program would increase that share, under the higher estimate, to 0.28%. Read more.

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**Engineers Week 2024 — Welcome to the Future!**

Founded by NSPE in 1951, Engineers Week (February 18–24, 2024) is dedicated to ensuring a diverse and well-educated future engineering workforce. The latest theme for Engineers Week — *Welcome to the Future!* — seeks to inspire the next generation to play a vital role in innovating solutions to global challenges that impact future generations. By working together to develop new technologies, products, and opportunities, engineers create new possibilities that make the world a better place.

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