TDOT Audit Shows Lack of Inflationary Adjustments

An audit of Tennessee’s Department of Transportation shows the department hasn’t properly adjusted estimates based on inflation, hasn’t done a proper information systems update analysis in six years and did not have a consistent evaluation system for rest area maintenance.

The audit was presented to a joint government operations subcommittee as the Tennessee Comptroller’s Office presented its findings, The Center Square reports.

It said the inflationary aspects of road repair costs has contributed to the backlog of road construction work that has grown from an estimated $8.5 billion in projects in 2014 to $11 billion in 2017 to $26 billion most recently. Tennessee is one of just six states that does not create debt to accomplish road projects and instead has a pay-as-you-go system for funding road work.

Inflation has increased the cost of steel and aluminum 52%, paint 36%, asphalt 35%, crushed limestone 33% and ready-mix concrete 25%, according to the comptroller.

“The issue we typically have with estimates is that, if a project takes 15 years to get to the leading process, inflation can obviously eat our lunch, if you will,” TDOT Deputy Commissioner Will Reid said. “One of the things that we want to do is take lessons learned in construction and maintenance, feed those back into the delivery process when projects are originally conceived such that we can take those risk out early on.” Read more.

Nuclear Will Be Part of Tennessee’s Clean Energy Future

The Tennessee Valley Authority is planning to build what may become the nation’s first mini nuclear plant in Oak Ridge, the place where the first electricity from nuclear power was generated, according to WKMS.
The federal utility has proposed constructing a “small modular reactor,” the industry term for a nuclear plant that is smaller than a conventional plant with parts manufactured in a factory. TVA has obtained some regulatory approval to build a 300-megawatt reactor, about a quarter of the capacity of one of the 1.1-gigawatt units at its nearby Watts Bar Nuclear Plant.

Small modular reactors have the same basic technology as conventional nuclear reactors — heating water with uranium and feeding steam into a turbine. But the hope is that these little nukes will be easier and cheaper to build.

“This is a gift that will keep on giving, to the country, to this region and to the world,” US Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said during a press conference in Oak Ridge.

The reactor will be built at TVA’s Clinch River site, contained on a 1,200-acre property in Oak Ridge, just outside of Knoxville. Read more.

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