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Road construction info center opens

TDOT spokesman says new SmartFIX40 office is 'setting the bar' for nation

By **DON JACOBS**, jacobs@knews.com
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State officials on Thursday opened the first community center in the nation where the public can regularly view information about a major road construction project and express concerns to authorities overseeing the work.

"Something of this scale, I don't think there's been anything like it in the country," said Travis Brickey, spokesman for the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

"As far as a public outreach effort and providing information, it's setting the bar," he said. "I think other states are watching this to see how it goes."

The SmartFIX40 Community Center and Project Office is at 915 N. Sixth Ave., where North Fifth, North Fourth and North Sixth avenues intersect.

The center will be open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday and is staffed by employees from TDOT or Wilbur Smith Associates, the engineering firm on the project. The telephone number at the office is 865-329-4640.

"It's a place where people can stop by and look at plans and get answers or express concerns," said Fred Corum, director of TDOT Region One. "We want to minimize the frustration that always comes with a project of this size."

The first two phases of SmartFIX40 involve extending Hall of Fame Drive from Summit Hill Drive to Broadway and reconfiguring the James White Parkway. Ray Bell Construction Company Inc. won the project with an \$85 million bid.

Maps 6 feet tall cover walls in the 4,000-square-foot modular building used as the community center. Artists' renderings of what finished interchanges and ramps will look like adorn several walls. The center also has a computer terminal to show pictures and diagrams of the project.

A second modular building next door to the community center offers more than 3,000 square feet for project inspectors.

Brickey said the two buildings and furnishings cost \$389,000. The modular buildings will be moved to other TDOT projects once the SmartFIX40 effort is finished in the summer of 2009, he said.

Hall of Fame Drive should be completed by December 2006, and James White Parkway will be closed from December 2006 to October 2007, when it should be finished.

State officials expect to let the contract next year to widen Interstate 40 from Cherry Street to Interstate 275.

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