



GREATER MEMPHIS CHAMBER

AASHTO  
c/o Monica Russell  
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I am writing to share my support for the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) as they are considered for the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) 2022 Transportation Award in Technology and Innovation.

On May 11, 2021, a large crack was discovered in a critical steel support beam on the I-40/Hernando De Soto Bridge which provides passage across the Mississippi River between Arkansas and Downtown Memphis, Tennessee. This discovery led to the immediate shutdown of the bridge and a process of intense examination and critical repairs that affected barge traffic for three days and the lanes on the bridge for truck and vehicle traffic for three months.

Memphis is one of the most indispensable cities in our hemisphere for logistics and transportation. Our assets include the busiest cargo airport in the world, the third largest trucking corridor in the nation, and the distinction as one of only two American cities with five Class I railroads. Thus, the bridge shutdown proved to be a major disruption to the national supply chain and our regional economy.

The leadership we saw from TDOT throughout this ordeal was critical. From the moment the story broke, TDOT reached out to our team at the Chamber to ensure there was ongoing communication with the business community. With TDOT's partnership, we hosted two major convenings of government and business leaders from Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The meetings included leaders at the highest levels: Tennessee Governor Bill Lee, Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, Acting Federal Highway Administrator Stephanie Pollock, TDOT Commissioner Clay Bright, Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland, over 30 business leaders from our region, and even Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg.

I was most impressed by how TDOT Commissioner Bright ensured his leadership team met with us at least weekly to provide updates. Their understanding of how businesses, already reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, would be hardest hit by this shutdown and in need of more frequent and specific updates was spot on. These weekly meetings and other interactions allowed our staff to produce the "M-BRIDGE" email briefing we shared with investors weekly for the duration of the bridge's closing.

Their innovative approach to engage the business community directly during this shutdown provided what so many of those businesses needed as they worked to adjust their operations and output on a daily basis. Without reservation, I am happy to support the candidacy of TDOT for this award and welcome the opportunity to say more if needed.

Sincerely,

Beverly Robertson  
President and CEO