



# Project Title: Economic Benefits of TDOT's Rail Connectivity Grant Program

## **Problem Description**

Tennessee's waterways offer a unique opportunity for intra/interstate freight transportation, with the potential to connect the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico through the various ports in Tennessee (TN) including the Ports of Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and Memphis (listed alphabetically). Despite being landlocked, Tennessee possesses a crucial saltwater connection through its inland waterways.

## **Research Objectives**

Before proceeding with significant investments, it is essential to conduct a thorough feasibility study to assess the economic, environmental, and logistical impacts of utilizing Tennessee's waterways for interstate freight transportation. The Port of Knoxville has a strategic location that provides a gateway for connecting inland waterways to major trade routes.

## **Potential Implementation and Expected Benefits**

The benefits of the proposed project are multifaceted and can be summarized as follows: **Economic Growth and Competitiveness, Environmental Sustainability, Infrastructure Resilience and Reliability, Regional Development and Connectivity**. Implementation of the project's outcomes can fall under policy and regulatory changes (*i.e.*, translating recommendations into policy proposals); support securing funding for infrastructure investments (*i.e.*, government entities, private investors, and public-private partnerships may collaborate to secure funding for infrastructure investments identified by this study); stakeholder engagement and collaboration (*e.g.*, public-private partnerships may be formed to leverage resources, expertise, and shared goals from opportunities identified by this study).

## **Project Number:**

RES (2025-05)

## **TDOT Lead Staff:**

(Dan Pallme)

## **Principal Investigator(s):**

(Dr. Andrew Yu) | (PI)

(University of Tennessee -  
Knoxville)

## **Project Term:**

(September 2024) to (February  
2026)