

**ROADWAY INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS
AND THEIR IMPORTANCE TO
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT VITALITY AND SURVIVAL**

Kenny Martin

City Manager/

Economic and Community Development Director

City of Mount Juliet, Tennessee

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The purpose of this report is to display the need and importance for roadway improvements and monies necessary to stimulate further economic and community development in the city of Mount Juliet, Tennessee by improving access for the Providence Mall area.

- I. History of Mount Juliet, Tennessee
- II. Evolution of a Small City
- III. Providence Traffic Congestion
- IV. Seeking and Securing Roadway Improvement Solutions and Funds (Attachments)
- V. Summary and Final Recommendations
- VI. Closing Thoughts

This paper is created to explain and justify the need and importance of and for roadway infrastructure improvements in the Providence and I-40 area to achieve current and future economic and community development for Mount Juliet, Tennessee. This discussion will also include information related to the grant application and award of local, state and/or federal monies needed and necessary for this project to proceed.

Mount Juliet is a city located in western Wilson County, Tennessee. A suburb of Nashville, Mount Juliet is approximately 17 miles east of downtown Nashville, and is located only ten miles east of the Nashville International Airport. Formerly known as the Purple Martin Capitol of Tennessee, Mount Juliet is now known as the City between the Lakes because of its proximity to Percy Priest and Old Hickory Lakes.

Since its incorporation in 1972, Mount Juliet has seen continued population and business growth, and has seen exponential growth since the early nineties and especially since 2005 upon the opening of Providence, Del Webb, and Providence Marketplace. Known as affordable, clean, well governed, and prosperous, Mount Juliet now has over 28,000 plus residents who call it home.

Mount Juliet is bordered by I-40 and SR-840, and has Interstate access to I-24 and I-65. It is only a day's drive to more than half of the American population. This Interstate and State highway access has brought a multitude of new businesses and residents over the past decade to Mount Juliet, making it one of the fastest growing communities in Tennessee. In 1990 Mount Juliet had a population of 3,500. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the city had a total population of 23,777, which represented a 91 percent increase over 2000-It was estimated that in 2013 the population had grown to 28,222, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, demonstrating continued substantial growth of the community.

As with any rapidly growing community, one of the biggest and most common problems is its roadway and overall infrastructure needs. With only a twenty cent property tax earmarked entirely for fire service operation needs, Mount Juliet has always had to look for other creative financing methods to fund its ever growing population and infrastructure needs without unfortunately being forced to raise property taxes on the very people that call Mount Juliet home.

Most of the infrastructure and financing needs began to truly come along with the now well known residential and open air shopping/dining and entertainment center Providence Marketplace and Providence. While growth can be both a blessing and a curse, thankfully for Mount Juliet this development and others have proven to be more of a blessing. However, the blessing of growth has not risen to the level the city, our residents, and our visitors truly deserve, desire, and need as a result of the major traffic congestion that has also come with the growth.

As a result, many Mount Juliet residents have let the city staffers and elected leaders know exactly how they feel the process and infrastructure could have and should have been better planned, designed, engineered, and budgeted. Their sentiments and frustrations certainly appear warranted and do have merit, based on an analysis of the situation. Before the major recession of 2008-2009, many cities like ours took great pride in maintaining low taxes for its citizens. However, before the great recession of 2008-2009, many Americans and cities were living and spending beyond their means all while building massive debt.

Mount Juliet wasn't necessarily guilty of waste and overspending, but it was a little naïve in its growth projections, strategic planning, and how it would pay for the growth that was expected. The great recession of 2008-2009 not only negatively impacted many families and businesses, including the unfortunate reality of many bankruptcies.

It also demonstrated the need and importance to start living within the city's means, and that communities like Mount Juliet, needed to do more to retain the businesses that exist within the city, as well as becoming more creative in recruiting new business if they were to survive and prosper. In addition, communities like Mount Juliet would have to figure out how they could plan for and finance the improving of infrastructure today and the future.

Looking back, it is fortunate that Mt. Juliet had a vision for sustained economic development long before it was known that the great recession of 2008-2009 was coming and the impact it would have. Although arguably a little naïve with some planning and vision, City officials evidently understood and appreciated the importance of maintaining a low tax base for its citizens in a growing city and knew that one of the best ways to keep taxes low would be to bring in more businesses. As a result Mount Juliet decided to start its own economic development program so that it could focus on its own needs in a much more proactive way. They also knew the person overseeing the program would need every ECD tool available to obtain and maintain success, and that economic development professional together with the local leadership would need passion and knowledge to be successful.

As a result Mount Juliet hired a director to oversee the program and provided the necessary training through OU EDI and other best practice economic development courses offered through the University of Tennessee's in-state certification program to provide its director and staff with the needed tools for success. City officials believed that these tools

coupled with hard work could help the city maintain its low tax base by recruiting new businesses, retaining current businesses and raising its tax base.

As a result of starting its own Economic Development Program, Mount Juliet learned from many of the mistakes that were made prior to Providence and what would be needed going forward. The first task was to quickly start addressing the major traffic woes Providence Marketplace had brought on as a result of the traffic congestion and rapid growth. After Providence Marketplace began to suffer major traffic congestion issues, it had become readily apparent that if Mount Juliet needed to find a way to address and fund its traffic infrastructure needs in the Providence area. Otherwise, the economic engine it had come to depend upon for tax revenue and maintaining its low tax base was going to begin to suffer and eventually fail.

Knowing the city needed to act fast; the city put together a strategic plan based on past oversights, funding shortfalls and the city's long range transportation plan which had changed many times over the years as a result of unexpected growth and necessity. Mount Juliet began to pinpoint the current and future problem areas and determining solutions. Knowing the solutions would need funding, the city immediately started looking for state and federal support to improve the main congestion areas of Providence Marketplace which were I-40 and Mount Juliet Road intersections. Unfortunately, the initial research and findings were not what Mount Juliet had hoped to hear regarding available support and funding.

The findings from the research determined that state and federal roadway money requests were at an all time high, while available monies were at an all time low. The city had learned that if it wanted help with funding and improving the roadways in the Providence and I-40 area, it would also have to take on much of the responsibility for getting it underway. That help would

require the city to pay for and conduct its own traffic and engineering studies and pay for any right of way needed as well.

Knowing what it needed to do, the city hired a second city engineer who began to conduct the needed traffic studies and research the state and federal government would need. The first phase of the research was to create a strategic plan that outlined the top roadway problem areas and prioritized each by level of importance, need, and ability to bring to fruition.

The city engineering department and ECD department worked hand in hand to determine any and all negative impacts that the infrastructure needs were creating for existing businesses and recruitment efforts. Once the roadway priority list was completed, it was learned that the main traffic issues were being created by inadequate traffic flow capacity and congestion on Mount Juliet Road and the I-40 Interchange which both are vitally important to the overall vitality of Providence Marketplace and were quickly nearing a near failure rating.

The list showed that adding a second North MJRD lane over the I-40 bridge was the number one priority and that a second right turn lane off of Providence Way/Belinda Parkway onto North Mount Juliet Road was the second priority and would be needed to alleviate the traffic backups on Belinda Parkway and MJRD. The Mayor and Board of Commissioners then reviewed the priority recommendations and directed city staff to begin working with the state and federal government officials and departments in hopes of locating and securing state and federal government roadway improvement support.

At that point, city engineering and ECD staff reached out to both TDOT and State Department of Economic Officials and requested a meeting. The meeting was requested so that Mount Juliet could make TDOT and State ECD aware of the traffic problems Mount Juliet was dealing with and the negative impact it was having on current businesses, new business, and job

creation and recruitment efforts for Mount Juliet. At that meeting, TDOT advised city staff of the work that would need to be conducted at the city's expense to even become eligible for the already tight state and federal funds.

Thankfully, Mount Juliet had some state and federal roadway money request experience and knowledge it had gained as a result of the roadway improvements planned for and installed prior to and the coming of Providence Residential and Providence Marketplace. However, what Mount Juliet didn't anticipate was the massive congestion brought on by the new development; the city also did not anticipate that some traffic infrastructure projects like the Central Pike Interchange, which was originally planned to be completed long before 2015, would not yet be done or even designed, engineered, budgeted or funded by January 2015.

Knowing all this Mount Juliet knew the task at hand and conducted costs analysis estimates for building and funding the following:

- Adding another northbound lane to MJRD and the I-40 Overpass. Cost: 12 million (engineering in progress, no funding at present time) Working with state and federal government on funding support.
- Adding another right turn lane off of Providence Way/Belinda Parkway onto MJRD. Cost: 2 million (engineering in progress, no funding at present time) Working with state and federal government on funding support. (See attached exhibit)
- Remarketing of 226-B off-ramp. (See attached exhibit)
- Adding a traffic signal to Belinda Parkway at Providence Trail. (funded)
- Adding Traffic Adaptation from Paddocks to South of Providence: Cost: 1 million (funded) Work to begin fall 2015.

- Completing Eastern Connector to alleviate traffic congestion on MJRD in the Providence and I-40 areas. Funded with construction to start on the 22 million dollar project May of 2015.
- Continuing engineering work on the Central Pike Interchange. This interchange would sit west of the Mount Juliet Road and I-40 exits. This interchange is approved as a result but not yet funded. Right of way work and engineering work is currently underway.

If funded the Central Pike Interchange project would alleviate much of the traffic in the Providence MJRD area by providing another north-south corridor. Unfortunately this project even if funded today would take five years to complete.
- Completing I-40 Interchange Lighting Project. Funded with work to begin summer 2015. This project will improve to overall vehicular flow during low light and inclement weather events that reduce visibility and increase congestion. Mast Lighting the I-40 Interchange. Cost: 1 million (funded) work to begin 8-2015.

The vision for the city is to maintain a low tax rate for our residents as a result of increasing our sales tax revenue. This can only be accomplished and maintained as a result of proper traffic infrastructure. Current ECD retention and recruitment efforts are being impacted daily along with local business success and vitality as a result of the traffic congestion and are only being magnified by perception.

Mount Juliet's number one priority is public safety and service. In order to maintain the level of safety and service our citizens desire, deserve and have come to expect, Mount Juliet has to increase its level of sales tax revenue and this can only be accomplished by improving the flow of traffic in the Providence Marketplace and throughout our city.

Sub-Topic: Strategic Planning and Vision

The city has made mistakes like many other rapidly growing cities. For example, one problem area was created as a result of staggered elections and the fact that as different elected officials come on board and others leave, so does the strategic plan and vision for the city and the long range transportation plan. The unfortunate and unintentional result would be that various roadways on the strategic plan would be removed as priorities changed over the years and replaced with new priorities as different elected officials came on board. This unforeseen impact was recognized by the current elected leaders and as a result changes were made. Those changes came after many brainstorming meetings between elected leaders and various city department heads were held to create a needs assessment and priority list of roadway and infrastructure needs for the city and long range transportation plan.

One of the positive results of the meetings created a top five list of roadways to be improved. It also brought on an ordinance by the current elected leaders that before the current priority list could be changed a commission vote would have to be held that consisted of two meetings and two votes. Out of those two meetings and votes the majority of our five elected leaders would have to vote to amend the top five priority list before it could be changed or amended. This has helped the city stay focused on priorities and eliminate starting and stopping projects in lieu of others.

Mount Juliet didn't fail or even drop the ball with its strategic planning or infrastructure plans. Mount Juliet simply faced unforeseen and unexpected rapid growth and simply could not keep up with the growth, nor could the city find a way to secure the funding needed.

Economic Development Planning and Highway Infrastructure Planning must go hand in hand. Economic Development and Vitality can't happen without good access, and Highway Infrastructure can't happen without a way to fund it. The two have to co-exist in order for either to occur or survive, which is why both have to be both constant works in progress.

Economic Development, Strategic Planning, Finance, Business Recruitment and Retention and Marketing and Attraction are just a few of the courses and tools a good economic developer will need to be successful. This knowledge is essential to operating and running a successful economic development department or organization, but it is only a part of what a community and city needs to be successful and prepared. City leadership has to stay focused on the tasks at hand. They must build working relationships with the citizens, other economic development professionals, state representatives, federal representatives, TDOT, the state economic development agency, TVA, and so on.

The City must look for multiple ways to fund and pay for the roadway and other infrastructure needs in order to not only provide essential services, but to also prosper and grow. If not, Mt. Juliet could end up like Gary, Indiana or Detroit, Michigan, both cities on the decline and seeing rapid decline in both residential and job population, not to mention major financing woes and even bankruptcy.

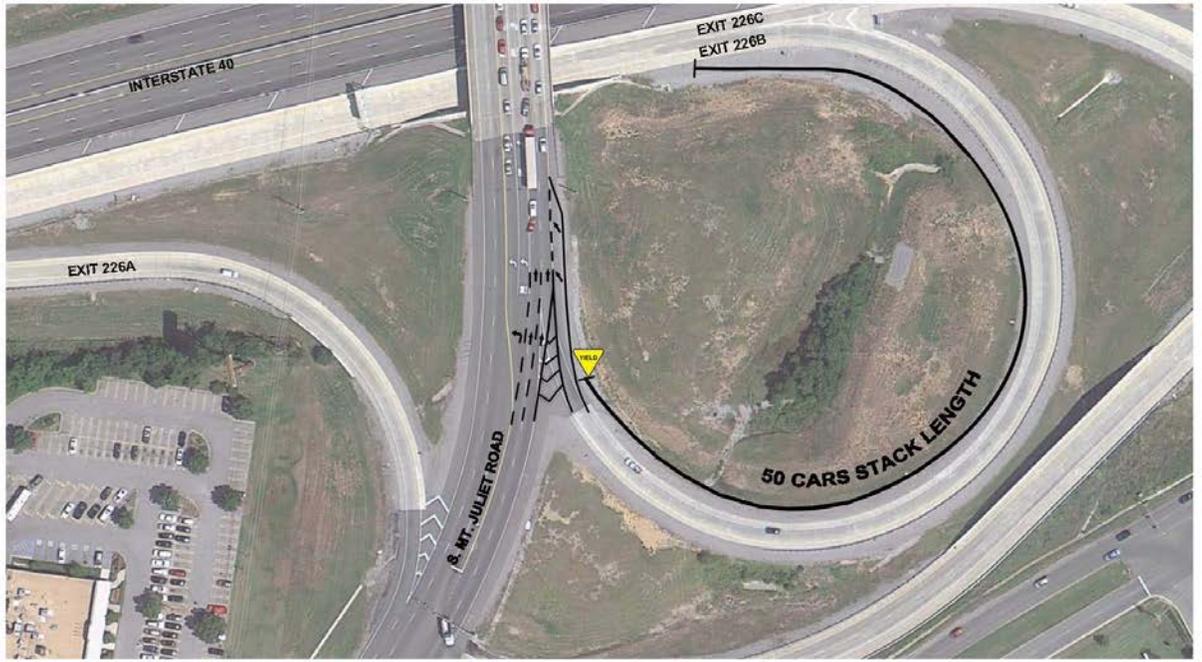
Economic Development and Planning are relative to everything and a community simply can't survive or grow without them. A community can't see where it's going without a vision, doesn't know where it's going without a plan, can't get there without a way and can't pay for it without revenue.

Kenny Martin

City Manager/ECD

City of Mount Juliet

Exhibit 1: Proposed Improvements to the 226 B Exit Ramp. These improvements would help the flow of traffic on MJRD north bound by providing two dedicated north bound lanes on MJRD.



CIVIL SITE
DESIGN GROUP
300 NORTH STATE STREET, SUITE 100, MEMPHIS, TN 38102
901.525.1100 FAX 901.525.1101

INTERSTATE 40 & S. MT. JULIET ROAD
MT. JULIET, WILSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

Exhibit 2: Previous changes that were implemented prior to and during construction of Providence Marketplace and Providence

These improvements are all in place as of 2015.

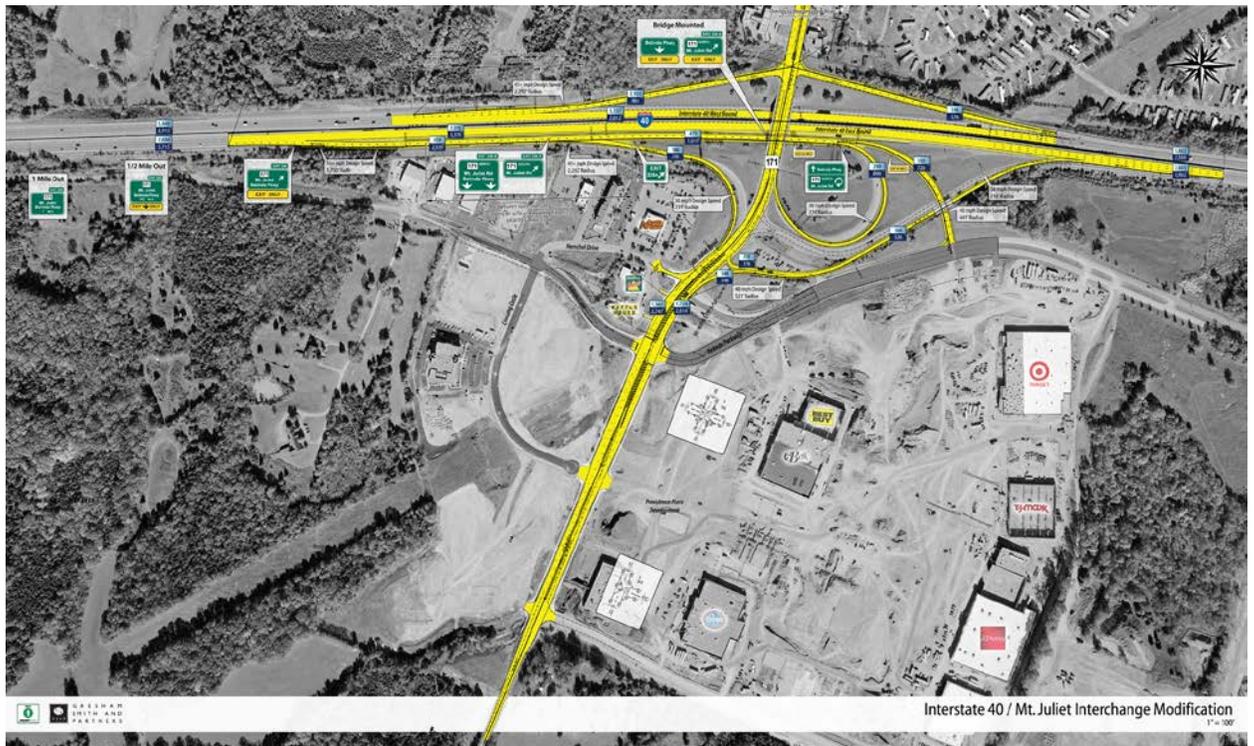


Exhibit 3: Proposed Improvements to Providence Way/Belinda Parkway and MJRD.

These improvements would add an additional right turn lane off of Providence Way/Belinda Parkway, thus improving the current congestion created by the one right turn lane and the congested cueing created as a result.

