



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Governor and Legislative Leaders Call for Action Now

January 21, 2015



Dear «GreetingLine»

Last Wednesday, I attended Governor Jay Nixon's State of the State address which set forth his priorities for the coming year. I was delighted to hear that new funding for transportation was included in the Governor's agenda. The Governor laid out the problem to the General Assembly, his cabinet, statewide officeholders, members of the Supreme Court and a packed gallery: "Missouri has the seventh-largest highway system in the nation, But we rank 46th in how much we invest to maintain it."

It was clear the Governor had carefully considered MoDOT's newly released proposal on "Missouri's 325 System." "Last week, we heard MoDOT lay out – in stark terms – what this means. On thousands of miles of state roads, from Lindbergh in St. Louis to Rangeline in Joplin, we'll barely be able to patch potholes. By 2017, we won't even have enough revenue to match federal highway dollars," Governor Nixon remarked.

But the Governor did more than just highlight the insufficient funding problem; he went on to offer some possible solutions like tolling I-70 and adjusting the gas tax. The Governor didn't dictate to the General Assembly how to act, but noted that these options "deserve serious consideration." With respect to tolling, he acknowledged that "the Highway Commission's recent report showed that this approach could make I-70 better and safer ... and free up tens of millions of dollars for other roads around the state." Addressing the gas tax, Governor Nixon said, "Missouri's gas tax hasn't gone up a penny in nearly 20 years. It's the fifth lowest in the nation. With gas prices as low as they are now, this is worth a very close look."

The Governor offered this final charge to our legislative leaders, "If we want to leave Missouri roads better than we found them, the only thing we can't do is sit still. This is a major long-term challenge – so let's get moving now." Governor Nixon's comments could not have been more timely and clear.

The following day I addressed the Missouri Conference on Transportation sponsored by the Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Before my talk we all had a chance to hear from the new committee chairs for transportation in the Senate and House – Senator Doug Libla and Representative Glen Kolkmeier. They echoed the Governor's call to action.

Senator Libla told the audience that he had supported Amendment 7, but there was no sense looking back and everyone needed to "get up, dust off and move forward" with other efforts. He stated there was no reason to be afraid and that he was up to the challenge. Everyone benefits from transportation and we need to find a way to pay for it. Finally, underlining the sense of urgency, he remarked that he has a sign hanging in his office that says, "Do It Now." Senator Libla promised the group that he could not guarantee the end result, but he could guarantee the effort.

Representative Kolkmeier stated that we cannot continue "to kick the can down the road." He noted his business depends on a good transportation system and pledged support in finding a solution to the funding shortfall.

These words of commitment from both branches of government and across the aisle are a promising start to the new legislative session. Now, it's down to hard work. Even with these bold words, there are still many legislators that must be educated. Following my presentation, I was asked what each person could do to help solve Missouri's insufficient funding challenge. My response at the conference and to those reading this email is that we must assume personal responsibility to speak with our legislators.

Our Governor and leaders on the transportation committees need your help to foster bipartisan support where personal and political interests are set aside for the good of all Missourians. The most effective way for your voice to be heard is to personally visit your elected leaders in Jefferson City or in your home district. The next best action is to make a personal phone call to your legislators. Finally, letters are also effective ways to urge our leaders to act now. MoDOT stands ready to provide additional information for Missourians to better understand transportation issues and to urge our elected leaders to take action now.

If you would like to communicate with the Commission, you can always reach us at MHTC@modot.mo.gov.

Onward!

Stephen R. Miller
Chairman

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