



View from the Chair

Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission

Demanding More, Investing Less

March 20, 2015



Dear «GreetingLine»

I have previously addressed the chronic underfunding of transportation over the last two decades which has thrust Missouri to the brink of forfeiting hundreds of millions in federal funds and forced MoDOT to propose historic cuts in service as it implements Missouri's 325 System. Ironically while we invest less in our system we continue to demand more from it. For instance, this legislative session, as in the last several years, bills have been filed to increase the weight limits on our roads and bridges and to also increase speed limits. Both of these put additional pressure on our underfunded

system.

The situation reminds me of a person who won't spend the money to change the oil or replace the tires on a car but wants to pull heavy loads and drive at top speed. Something has to give. Before we begin to entertain further demands on our transportation system we must commit to first fund it – not merely band aid measures but long-term sustainable revenue sources.

Providing for the safety of our citizens and enabling the economic competitiveness of our state are two of the primary reasons for having a modern and efficient transportation system. Raising the speed limit on rural interstates and freeways puts convenience before safety. MoDOT Chief Engineer Ed Hassinger told the House Transportation Committee last month that when the speed limit was raised in 1996 from 65 mph to 70 mph, Missouri saw a 45 percent increase in fatal crashes and that when Kansas raised the speed limit on its interstates, fatal crashes jumped by 54 percent.

There are good reasons for increasing weight limits on our highways, but only if they are made in concert with providing additional resources that are adequate to replace MoDOT's critical condition and weight-restricted bridges. Increasing weight limits for trucks is not appropriate at a time when our construction budget is falling to a level that is insufficient to maintain our

statewide transportation network. Increasing weight limits while bridges are deteriorating is not a formula for success.

We simply cannot afford to add additional wear and tear to our roads and bridges. We currently have nearly 600 bridges that are in critical condition and 1,400 that have load restrictions. At projected annual contractor award levels of \$325 million, it's anticipated that we will see the need to load-post and close an increasing number of bridges in the future. We have five closed across the state today.

Deteriorating roadways will crumble under the weight of heavier trucks as well. In fact, it's projected that only 27 percent of our state's supplementary highway system will be in good condition in 10 years. Heavier vehicles will accelerate that rate of deterioration.

These two scenarios illustrate that if we want more out of our transportation system – like better bridges and safer highways – we need to pay more to realize those improvements. There is no free lunch. The time to act is now.

Let's get going!

Stephen R. Miller
Chairman

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